

THE GUARDIAN



PLEASE NOTE:

Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond anyone's control, there are no Alice Jones illos in this issue of Guardian. Having held your reservations for so long and having a deadline to meet, we felt we could no longer hold up publication. Please excuse the three blank pages and accept our apologies.

THE EDITORS

I am my own Beginning...

The then, the now, the forever.
Huge, gray monolith born at the moment of creation; your
Echoes of the past call to me, irresistably.

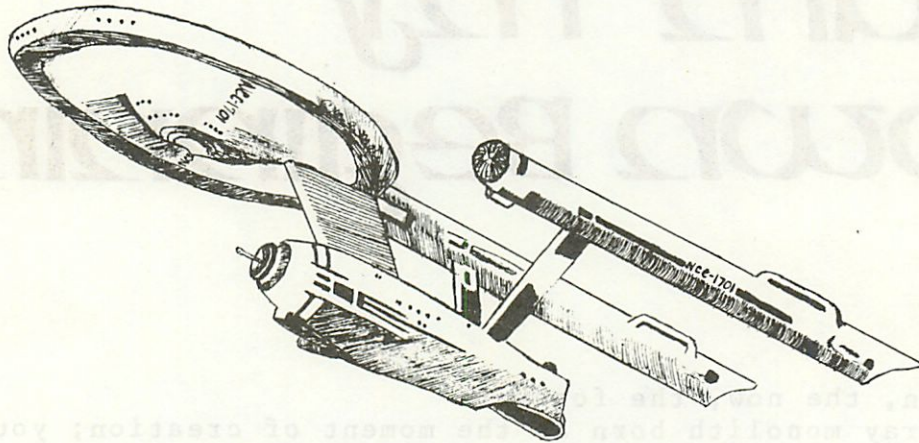
Gateway to what has been and what will be, its
Use is strictly forbidden.
A small ripple can have tidal consequences on the
River of time. Is that what undid your creators?
Days, or whole lives, can be relived.
In an instant I can play god
And rearrange the pieces on life's board. It's a
Narcotic. Did your makers succumb as I am to its lure?

Frances Zawacky

D E D I C A T I O N

Dedicated to FANDOM -- without whose help, guidance, and assistance
we would not be inmates of

THE NEW JERSEY HOME FOR THE PERPETUALLY BEWILDERED**



**Lynbrook and Brooklyn branches

GUARDIAN

EDITORS: Linda Deneroff & Cynthia Levine

Issue #1

August, 1978

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Bacover -- Amy Falkowitz

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"The time has come," the walrus said"...oops, wrong universe. But the more I consider it, the more I realize that that last sentence is perhaps more accurate than you might think. For the past eighteen months, I feel like I have been living *Alice in Wonderland*...and loving every minute of it! (My fellow editors understand; there is no point in explaining to the non-editors -- understanding only comes with doing.)

A few thank-yous are in order. First and foremost to all of you for your patience and support...we could not have done it without you. Second, to our contributors for coming through the way they did. Each of you was a jewel to work with...you made Linda's and my job that much easier. And, last but certainly not least, to Cargill, Incorporated and CBS without whom this zine would never have seen the light of day.

GUARDIAN takes great pleasure in introducing some new writers to zinedom. As a result of this "exposure", and your feedback, they will hopefully be persuaded and encouraged to continue with their writing. Fandom needs new blood...

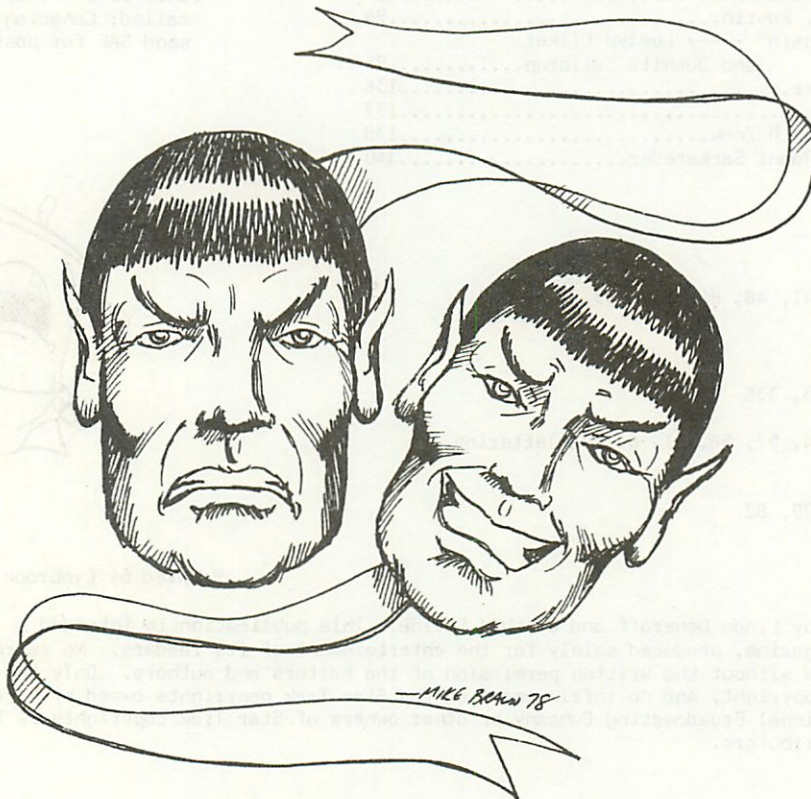
But there is a problem. The new writers don't know where to turn. Agreed, there is only one way to get your foot into the door and that is to submit something to an editor. There are plenty of editors, ourselves included, who are looking for material and would gladly consider a newcomer. That's where you "oldtimers" come in.

I'm positive that you know at least one struggling writer or artist. It is up to you to educate them. Tell them to submit to editors, and tell them that editors do not bite -- except at deadline time.

I have only one more thing to say...read on, and

E N J O Y ! ! ! ! !

Cynthia



A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away -- well, not exactly; it just seems that way. Putting out this fanzine has been a labour of love, a travail of agony, and just plain fun. To all of you who had to put up with baby-sitting this zine, I thank you. To all of you who have contributed, stand up and take a bow. To my parents -- well, that's enough of that.

It all started one day at Cynthia's house when in all innocence I turned to her and said, "Hey, why don't we do a fanzine?" Famous last words. Well, in all honesty, Cynthia had already worked on *Ambrov Zeor* and I had helped out on it as well as collated several other zines.... Little did I know that within a span of a year both Cynthia and I would move. Boy, the post awful must have loved us! Not to mention those of you who sent SASES and then worried if we got 'em. (Obviously we did; and I must admit the post awful wasn't too bad; they were especially prompt about doing something about the rip-offs in Cynthia's new building!)

Anyway, here we are, 18 months later... I think we have lots of goodies for you. Just briefly we have:

"And The South Shall Fall Again" by Leslye Lilker and Juanita Salicrup. It's the longest story in this issue, both in length and the amount of time we waited for it. Give yourself about an hour; keep all friends, relatives and telephones far from reach, and enjoy! By the way, subluxation is an incomplete or partial dislocation. Now I leave it to you to find the reference.

"Sworn Enemies" is by one of fandom's relatively new writers, Janice Hrubes. What happens when a Romulan falls in love with a Terran? You'll find out here.

"Memories," by Jacqueline Bielowicz is a beautiful eulogy to our heroes. The Spock portion is reprinted from *Sol Plus I* with the kind permission of Karen Fleming but the other vignettes were written specially for this issue. Read on.

"The Lost Colony," by Johanna Cantor is a disturbing tale of enslavement and survival. But where does symbiosis end and enslavement begin?

"The Sentinel," is by Sibyl Hancock, a professional writer, but new to fandom. In fact, had *Guardian* been out on schedule, it would have been her first published fan-fiction. This is a pure Trek tale of a type that's been missing from fandom for a while. We look forward to seeing more from Sibyl.

There's also plenty of humour and poetry inside, but you must already know that. This issue just seems to have grown and grown. We also have a special treat: Maggie Nowakowska presents a comprehensive time-line of Star Trek history from the dawn of the space age through the command of the Enterprise by one James T. Kirk. It's truly a magnificent and thoughtful piece of work, sure to generate lots of new ideas.

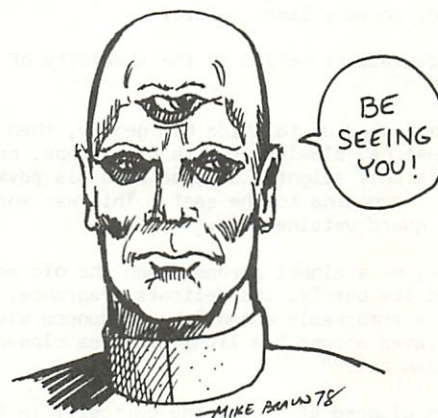
You will notice that there is no fanzine listing in this issue, although we had originally intended to put one in. Well, it's like this: the list grew longer and longer until we realised that just about every zine already appears in *Scuttlebutt*. So this is a plug for *Scuttlebutt*, the zine that tells you what other zines are out, will be out, or are out of print (as well as presenting reviews and relaying messages). Write to either Mary Ann Bentz, 3830 Mintwood Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15201, or Celeste Henkel, 2501 College Park Road, Allison Park, PA 15101. Subs are \$2.75 for three issues first class, or \$2.00 for three issues third class (at your own risk).

On a closing note, please remember: there are no typos in "First Garbage, but said story is full of references. See how many you can find. There are no prizes; we just want to see how alert you are.

Please let us know what you think of *Guardian*. We have tried to present many different facets of Trek in this issue, and we hope to continue doing so. There will be a second issue and hopefully it will not take as long to get to you. We already have some material and neither Cynthia nor myself plans to move in the near future. Issue two will contain some Star Wars material, now that Star Wars Corporation has given their approval. We have the privilege of presenting two stories in the Thousand Worlds series in the S'Wars universe by Maggie Nowakowska and Dyane Kirkland. However, I want to stress that our priority is and will continue to be Trek.

So, barring any unforeseen circumstances, we'll see you again in early '79. (HELP!) Live long and Prosper!

Sibyl



SWORN ENEMIES

Janice K. Hrubes

One hundred and ten years after the establishment of the Romulan Neutral Zone, ten years after the Enterprise incident, Commodore James T. Kirk and the Vulcan Ambassador-at-Large, Mr. Spock, in the interest of galactic peace, accepted an invitation to visit the Praetor's Palace. It was hoped that this would be a monumental step toward opening full, peaceful diplomatic channels with the Hegemony, perhaps eventually combining forces for the common defense and good of all.

As the days passed, the two friends, separated for three years by their destinies, slipped easily back into their old pattern. It was as if neither had left the Enterprise. One evening as they were strolling through the gardens, they discovered a beautifully carved tomb of rose-hued stone; the name and inscription were written in Terra Lingua.

LASLA SHO VAN
*She who held my life
in her hands for a time
And my heart throughout
eternity.*

Kirk ran his fingers over the inscription, frowning quizzically. "Speculation, Spock?" he asked just as he had asked so many times before.

Spock almost smiled at the absurdity of the question, and at the memories his tone generated. "Obviously a memorium."

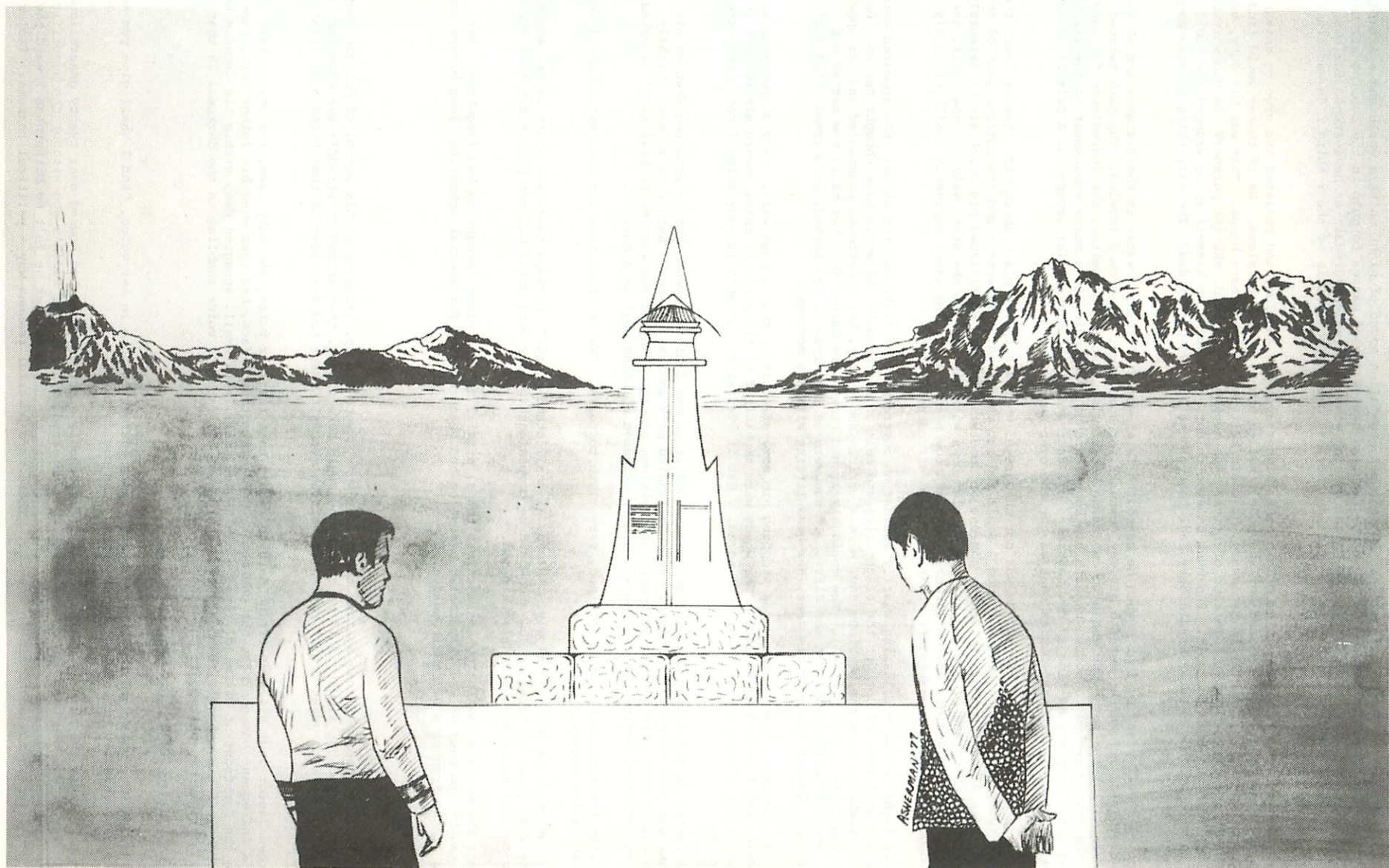
Jim looked up to chide him gently, then stopped as their ever-present guard stepped back, saluting. Across the flagstone, slowly but with firm steps, came the Praetor of all the Romulii: Taelor of the House of Kazan, his shoulders only slightly stooped with his advanced years, his thin white hair wafting gently in the cooling breeze from the mountains to the east. This was who they had come to see, to talk to. Jim would have stepped forward, but the guard detained him.

They were almost abreast when the old man stooped to pluck a flower from the shrubs. He held it for a moment, savoring its beauty, its delicate fragrance, then walked past them to place it in a bud vase beside the inscription. "A remarkable woman," he announced slowly. "She has been dead for over half my lifetime. Yet..." A small smile played across his lips; his eyes closed, remembering. "Would you care to hear how an Earth woman was buried on Romulan soil?"

Jim glanced at Spock; the curiosity in those Vulcan eyes made him smile. "We'd be honored to hear such a tale, Lord Taelor."

"Then let us sit a while." The ancient Romulan gestured to a bench strategically placed that he might see the tomb, a bench where he sat every night that weather and health permitted.

He had followed the lone survivor across broken terrain, sometimes running, sometimes climbing, and still she had eluded him. Taelor had exhausted his weapon, firing at brief patches of blue, but now the chase was finished. He watched the woman roll limply to the bottom of the slope, stopping against a rock. Taelor slipped the ceremonial knife from its sheath and carefully picked his own way down to jerk the semi-conscious woman up by her bright hair.



Two smoke-gray eyes met his own dark ones, hers heavily fringed with long lashes and smudged with exhaustion. She screamed a denial when she saw the knife, her right arm coming up. The rock impacted soundly and he tipped slowly forward into a well of darkness.

Awareness was the cool rock surface beneath his cheek, the alien sound of night on this world and a painfully throbbing head. Taelor forced himself to his feet, fighting back waves of nausea to gulp in the cooling air until his head cleared. Above him, the first stars of the evening watched in silent disdain as he searched for his knife, uncaring and as unmoved by this small drama as they had been by the battle of their ships. He was alone, unarmed on an alien world with a sworn enemy.

Taelor shifted his *stola*, the emblem of his rank, higher upon his shoulder and resisted the urge to shiver in the rapidly cooling night as he wondered why she hadn't killed him as he lay helpless. He of course would find other weapons or make them himself; if necessary, he would kill her with his bare hands. That was his duty, but why hadn't she killed him? Was it some kind of trick? Was he now the pursued, she the pursuer? He did shiver then, not from fear but from the cold. She must be even colder, he thought to himself as he wrapped the *stola* around him to ward off the chill. Or did they feel the cold as his own people did? The only thing he knew about humans was that they died well.

The moon was well past its zenith when he heard the faint sound of rushing water in the distance and he quickened his pace to find it. After wending his way downward for some time, the ground leveled. The path twisted between canyon walls; the noise increased to cascading waterfalls. Water and shelter, the ingredients for survival. Even the ground seemed to soften beneath his boots, gradually changing to a mossy embankment as the air grew moist around him. Droplets as fine as dew saturated his hair and clothing as Taelor scooped up a palmful of water to sip from one of the many catch-basins that caught the over-spill.

Although he was tired and thirsty, he was not unaware of what was taking place about him. Taelor heard the almost silent swoop of a winged predator upon a small rodent, the sound of insects - and the curious lack of sound to his right. The silence could only denote someone or something there. He finished his drink almost leisurely, having pin-pointed the place of his unease. He settled down with his back to the stone walls of the cliff, the catch-basin between him and his unseen lurker. This had now become a waiting game; supremely confident in his ability to dodge the knife or makeshift spear, he could afford to wait.

By first light he saw her leaning wearily against an outcropping of light-colored stone. She appeared more dead than alive at first; if not for the slight rise and fall of her breasts, he would have thought her so. Her eyes, as he remembered from the previous day, were a curious smoky gray, her cheekbones pronounced and her upper lip swollen and bruised from her fall. The curiously arched brows were darker than her hair, now matted and lusterless, and her uniform was torn and dirty. If she were as dangerous as she looked, an unarmed child could have killed her. Taelor eased to his feet, her head lifting with his movement.

"Why?" she demanded weakly, the words stopping him more effectively than a high wall. "Why do you want to kill me? What have I ever done to you?" The words were emphasized by flipping his knife toward him so that it landed, clattering, almost at his feet. "Go ahead... Get it over with. I can't run any more; I can't even stay awake any more."

Taelor looked at the knife, stooped, and resheathed it in one fluid movement, but he squatted down on his heels to consider this enemy more closely. She was leaning back against the rock, both eyes closed. Tightly closed. He waited patiently until they opened of their own accord. "Why do you want me to kill you?" he asked pleasantly enough, considering the fact he was highly offended at being cast as a butcher.

"They aren't coming back," she explained, very close to tears. "We're stuck here for the rest of our lives. Do it now, while I'm drowsy."

"No." Taelor shook his head slowly. "Sleep. I shall stand guard." Perhaps there was truth in her words. Perhaps they were stranded here; if so, she would be companionship of a sort until his own people returned for him. They had to return; doubting would drive him mad.

He spent the morning fashioning small animal traps, a skill he long since thought he had forgotten. His father had taught him when he was very small, before he had been selected for special schooling, long before the youth camps or the Praetor's Personal Guard...

"Tzuis!" His father, immense against the bright suns, swung him up, laughing at his squeal of delight over his homecoming, up and up, almost as if he thought he could take flight, then around to straddle his shoulders as he hurried up the walk to greet Tzuis' patiently waiting mother. There had been love in that household, light, laughter, and warmth.

The grown Taelor shut his eyes trying hard to recall that familiar voice, the baby name, the joy he felt at his father's infrequent homecomings, but the memories of his mother's face, her eyes when his father left, came flooding to the forefront of his mind. Once again he was small, very small, snuggled deep within his trundle bed in the anteroom off his mother's chamber and he could hear his father's voice rumbling in the darkness in that private way they had of speaking to one another.

"A fine sturdy lad you have given me, beloved."

"But stay awhile," his mother whispered back, a soft entreating note in her voice, "and I shall give you many more," she always answered him, but he never stayed. He couldn't.

His mother closed the nursery the day he left for school, a nursery that had housed over twenty generations of his family. Taelor was the only son of the Kazan; men referred to him as the Kazan's son without the honorific, being born only to a handmaiden. Taelor would never inherit the Hegemony, yet he felt no bitterness toward the father who had never acknowledged him in council. There were powerful reasons why - political reasons. Taelor's

life would have been incredibly short if the Kazan had walked into the Council bearing his begotten son upon his shield for all men to see. The bastardization of Tzuis had been an act of love - not misplaced pride.

She awakened at dusk as he turned the small carcass on the improvised spit. He had been lucky. He knew that and did not discount that random factor as unimportant in the daily events of a man's life. Tomorrow he might not be lucky. He watched her warily out of the corner of his eye as she hobbled to the catch-basin to remove her boots. From the way she walked, he knew what he would see: only a fool wears new boots on a scouting expedition.

Taelor was self-righteously turning to tell her just how foolish she was when he noticed, really noticed, the shade of blood. *There is something terribly nauseating about red blood.* His expression and sound of disgust was noted; her shoulders stiffened.

"No comments," the girl snapped irritably. "I'm not real thrilled with the way you smell either!"

It was too ridiculous to answer; he ignored her and her statement, turning his back to her to tend the meat. He could hear her stripping her soiled garments away, and splashing as she waded out into the water, her teeth chattering. Then came the whop of wet uniform against the bank. Taelor pulled his own over his head and pitched it at her; as long as she was demeaning herself to play laundress, she might as well do his. She promptly pitched it back in his face.

He knew how to handle insubordinates. Taelor picked up the uniform and waded in after her. The third time he jerked her face up out of the water, she spluttered, "Oh, all right! If you're going to get all bent out of shape over a smelly tunic, I'll rinse it out for you."

"Good." He released her with a contemptuous flick of his fingers and waded out, supremely confident in his ability to handle any further demonstrations of rebellion. The sooner this alien female learned she was an inferior, the better. If she had been a Romulan woman, things would have been far different! They would have sat down, talked of small things of no importance, then one or the other would have suggested a swim - fully clothed of course! Both uniforms and bodies would have been clean and no one would have lost face.

He was once more busying himself with the meat when she waded out, wringing his tunic with neat, quick motions. The expression on her face amused him; obviously she was imagining it to be his neck. This one would need more than one lesson in obedience.

Taelor sliced off several pieces of meat, piling them neatly beside his place. He chewed one slowly, with an expression of stone, as the human pulled her own damp tunic back over her head and joined him. She started to reach and he slapped her hand. "You have not been given permission to join me."

She rocked back on her heels, her lower lip jutting out slightly in sullen consideration as he went back to chewing. She made a fast grab and he twisted her arm back until the meat dropped from her almost bloodless hand, but she didn't cry out. Once more he repeated himself, slowly and distinctly, never dropping his eyes from her angry ones. "You have not been given permission to join me."

"I didn't think it was necessary to wait for an engraved invitation!" she hissed through clenched teeth, jerking her arm away when he loosened his grip. Sullen and defiant, she retreated a few feet to rub her wrist. He went back to eating and waiting until her hunger would overpower her pride.

She watched every morsel he put into his mouth, nibbling her lower lip nervously as he carved more meat off the rapidly diminishing carcass. He almost chuckled at the low grumbling of her stomach as hunger won the victory. "May I join you?"

"No," Taelor told her flatly, cutting yet another thin slice. "I do not eat with inferiors."

"Inferiors!" She was on her feet in a flash. "I'll show you who's an inferior!" She darted over to his tunic that she had flung over a bush to dry and threw it into the dirt, then trampled it under foot. "There! No food, no laundry!"

Taelor picked up his belt, halved the length slowly and in full view of the angry girl. He flicked it twice, testing its strength and suppleness as her eyes widened considerably. "You... uh... you wouldn't... would..." she was mumbling as he stood up, then started walking toward her. "You *would!*" burst from her throat. The girl darted around the catch-basin into the suddenly welcome darkness. He could hear her scrambling to a safer position. "You *bastard!*" she shouted angrily.

"How did you know?" he yelled back, pinpointing her location by hearing. "How did you *know?*" His only answer was laughter, mocking laughter. "How *did* you know?" he screamed at that fading laughter.

He would not see her again for four days, then only from a distance. The girl was standing on a promontory, leaning insolently against a makeshift spear, watching him. She was gone by the time he scrambled up there. Diligent searching uncovered a crude campsite, but cold ashes were all he found, search as he might.

The days slipped into weeks, the weeks into months and the winter was hard upon this world before he found her again.

Taelor, from his vantage point behind a tree, watched the skin-clad woman walking down the trail to the river. He blew on his stiffening fingers to warm them as she knelt to fill a clay vessel with water, then pulled another pelt closer around her shoulders as the wind picked up. He wanted desperately to stamp his feet but didn't dare. She stopped, almost abreast of him, to cock her head to one side, listening.

Taelor held perfectly still, barely breathing as she searched the withering landscape and the trees. "I must be going stir-crazy," she finally told herself, and shifted the water jug to the other hip before starting back up the trail. Taelor waited as long as he dared, then followed her. He had to. She had food and shelter, and the small burrowing animals he had depended upon for survival had gone into hibernation.

The trail ended in a copse of blasted ancient trees and heavy thorn bushes. At first he thought the foliage unnaturally thick and, heart-quickenning, he grasped a branch and pulled... It was firmly rooted in the ground. Taelor picked up a fallen limb and began poking it into the heart of the thicket, still hoping. Finally he just sat down against a lightening-struck tree and dropped his head back to glare at the darkening sky. It would snow soon.

Something tapped him on his helmet. Startled, he jumped up, whirling to find the girl peering at him through a hole in the trunk.

"Are you going to stay out there all day?" she asked mockingly, "or are you going to come in?"

Taelor swept the trunk of the tree with his gaze, then the twisted roots and ground. "How?"

A moment later, the top of the stump flipped back and the girl popped out to shoulder-level, grinning at him. "Careful where you step," she warned him, "and don't forget to put the roof back."

It was a very matter-of-fact invitation, but Taelor was not without some trepidation as he peered down into the hole that led below ground. The inside of the bole was scratched and pitted from claws and her attempt to chisel out hand-holds; the roof was merely an odd-shaped piece of bark, strengthened with twigs. He slid one leg over, feeling for a toe-hold, then pulled in the other leg, squeezing downward carefully as he tried to fit the roof back into place. At any moment he half-expected to feel a knife sink into his back as he sought and found another foot-hold. Then he was on solid ground, stooping to avoid the low roof of the abandoned den she had found and enlarged for herself.

The human pushed aside a pile of pelts as he wrinkled his nose in disgust at the smell. "You'll get used to it," she told him truthfully as he gingerly sat down. She immediately grabbed his foot to jerk off his boot. Taelor, well aware of his precarious position, submitted to her ministrations as she stripped away his sock, then proceeded to rub his foot briskly.

"You... uh... seem to have done quite well for yourself," he told her distantly as the brisk rubbing turned his foot into a thousand tiny needlepoints of pain. "I congratulate you on your survival training."

"I learned to survive on an outworld," she corrected him, rubbing his foot dry with a soft furry pelt, then taking his other foot to repeat the process. "As for my burrow, I got lucky. The previous owner vacated the premises. All I had to do was clean it out and make it half-way habitable. There!" She had finished. "I'll make you some moccasins tomorrow."

"Pardon?" Taelor had heard the word as *Fy'Lits*, a small sock-like shoe for infants; when he repeated what he had heard, she heard it as "booties" and started laughing. "I see no reason to laugh at me."

"My stiff-necked enemy," she chuckled, making a dab at her joy-tears, "what you just said translates as socks for babies! The word I used is from a very old Terran language for shoes with no heels. The American Indians used them."

Taelor was still confused. He drew his fur-wrapped feet in closer to his body, looking about at the hide-draped den uneasily.

"Don't you see the joke?" the girl questioned him, then pushed her sleeve back to tap her forearm. "It's on whoever invented these new subcutaneous translators. You can talk to me and I can talk to you, but something we say in the ordinary course of conversation will never be understood."

Taelor grasped the proffered arm with one hand, then ran an experimental finger down her forearm. He found the incredibly small translator and shook his head in wonder. Translators he understood, but compared to the Federation's, his world's were incredibly bulky. All this time he had thought she spoke his language - badly, but coherent enough to understand.

Still chuckling at his face of dismay, she reached behind her and pulled a hide back to disclose neatly dug out shelves. "Are you hungry?" she asked pleasantly. He nodded, closing his eyes at the sight and smell of the food she pulled out.

His gut tightened alarmingly as his mouth salivated. He swallowed hard. But there is such a thing as formalities. "May I have permission to eat of your food?" he asked as she began piling a bark platter with dried meat.

"You mean you're actually asking?" she asked in surprise.

"This is, to all intents and purposes, your home," Taelor informed her weakly as she piled more meat on the platter. This was her hearth, not his, as the campfire had been. "There are hospitality bonds in my society."

"And in mine," she agreed, passing him the plate. He barely noticed her piling on more meat and fruit or opening a pouch of hard, gray-green things, several of which she rolled out on his plate. He was too busy wolfing down the meat to pay attention. All the questions he had in his mind seemed to vanish with the sight, smell and taste of food. Finally he could hold no more. She silently passed him the water vessel. He sipped slowly, then wiped his mouth on his tattered sleeve.

When he looked up she was watching him, smiling compassionately. To cover his embarrassment, he picked up one of the gray-green things. He rolled it between his fingers, then sniffed; it didn't look like food and it didn't smell like food. He set it aside. "I was... rather... hungry," he admitted slowly.

"You were starved," she corrected him, flinging open the pile of pelts. "Why don't you stretch out and sleep for a while? You're safe here."

The pallet looked inviting, very inviting, but Taelor hesitated. Twice his life had been in her hands. Did he dare risk a third time? He searched those alien eyes for the answer, saw concern, even a brief touch of pity and the fine lines caused by humor about them. "What is your name?"

"Lasla..." she answered as he slowly, wearily stretched out. "Lasla Shovan."

"Lasla," he repeated, throwing one arm over his eyes as she pulled another hide over him. "Mine is Taelor."

"Tay... eel... ohr," she mimicked softly. "Dear Mom," she told herself softly, "guess what's been sleeping in my bed?" as he drifted off to sleep.

He awoke alone, yawning and scratching, and shockingly naked. The realization of that made him sit up in a hurry, pulling the top robe about him protectively. Only a moment later, he was searching frantically for his own clothes and weapon, but all he found was a pile of furry clothes and boots like those the girl had worn. Drawing on the boots, he found his knife conveniently sheathed in the opening. At least she had not left him naked and defenseless on this alien world. He felt better as he resheathed the knife, more confident of dealing with the world on its own terms. Lasla was gone, but he had a place to stay, warm clothes; if he had to, he could fast until spring.

Thinking of fasting that long made his stomach growl and he pulled back the hide pelt that covered the larder to discover everything still there. Surprised, he finished dressing, tying the loin cloth into place with another strip of hide, and pulling the rough tunic over his head. Perhaps she had just gone for more water or perhaps she was out hunting?

He was pondering why she would bother to help him when something large growled, snuffling at the bole in the tree that ventilated the den. He instinctively froze as a dark glistening eye peered in at him, then relaxed as it moved away. He was breathing a sigh of relief when the beast started pawing at the dirt around the tree stump, digging him out, growling. Taelor pulled out his knife as dirt showered down on him, throwing up one arm to protect his eyes as he pushed away from the danger the beast presented. An opening emerged, filled by a giant snarling head; then the beast pulled back, and again reached in, reaching for him! Taelor slashed at the heavy paw and the beast jerked back, screaming in pain.

"Psssst!" Lasla hissed from the small tunnel right beside him. "Come on, idiot! That thing's bigger than both of us."

Taelor did not question succor at such an opportune moment, not with the beast redoubling its efforts to widen the opening in the roof. He dived in after the hastily-backing girl and the hide flap closed behind them. He hadn't thought about checking the other hide-draped walls for shelves or tunnels; he was glad she had come back and shown him that there was another opening to the outside!

Scarcely two meters into the dark tunnel, it forked to the right and left, one going down. Taelor, who had to wait for her to turn around, found himself going down and to the right. He would have much rather stayed and died fighting the beast. The tunnel, already small and cramped about his shoulders, seemed to grow closer, the air stagnant and thick. He couldn't breathe... sweat beaded on his forehead... he tried to call her name and his throat tightened as if a strong hand was choking him. He couldn't move.

She must have realized that he had stopped. She backed until she bumped into him. "Taelor? If that's not you, signify by growling."

"It... it..." He couldn't force the words out.

"Take my foot," she coaxed in the darkness. "The tunnel branches again in less than five feet and leads up upward into the thorn thicket. Try not to think about how small and dark it is in here. You'll..." She yelped pain as he found her foot. "I said hold it, not mash every bone in my foot!"

He hurriedly eased his grip and she moved away, with him continuously bumping into her or putting a hand down on her leg as she crawled through the tunnel. Then he saw a light filtering past her and quickened his pace, almost shoving her along in his hurry to reach the outside world. He did shove her aside to fling himself into the open niche among the thorn bushes to lie there gasping for air as the snow swirled about them in tiny flecks.

Before he had time to roll onto his back, Lasla was on her feet, kicking him in the side, anger blazing in her eyes. "You ever shove me again," she snarled, "and the next time the Grrrr Beast wants a mid-afternoon snack, you're it!"

Taelor came to his own feet, raw anger flooding him, white hot and seering at the very sight of her. Then reason returned. He drew a cleansing breath, and another, to purify his system as he forced his clenched hands to relax. "I broke bond with you," he apologized with a stammer. "I... I... I ask forgiveness."

"Aw, forget it," she mumbled in disgust. "Not everybody's a natural mole-child."

"Mole-child?" Taelor inquired as she peered over the top of the thicket in the direction of their hastily vacated burrow. The Grrrr Beast was still throwing up great chunks of earth in an effort to dig them out, and she resigned herself to the cramped little den on the other side of the hill. She was estimating how long it would take to enlarge it when he touched her arm and repeated himself. Only then did she realize that "mole" hadn't translated.

"Mole-child... My parents worked the mines on Janus II. I've been rambling around tunnels since birth,

probably since before birth. A mole is a small burrowing animal, and since children are small and I grew up in the mines, the name just seemed to fit: mole-child," she explained in a whisper as the Grrrr Beast gave up his search for them. "We'll wait a few minutes, then go back through the tunnel and salvage what we can. Uh... you can go back through the tunnel, can't you?"

"Yes," Taelor informed her firmly, and he knew he could, now that he knew where it led and how long it was.

"Good, but you better wait here until I'm sure the tunnel didn't collapse," Lasla informed him, and almost dived back into the tunnel they had so recently exited. Taelor used the time it took for her to reach the main den by relieving his bladder. A whistle alerted him, then he saw her arm waving him back. He went.

Lasla was already piling pelts and what was left of her dried meat into a bundle when he reappeared to look in astonishment at the damage. Where once had been a solid dirt roof was open air, bare ugly roots interlacing the reddening sky. She passed him a bundle. "Here."

He took it, squatting beside her as she stopped, resting her arms limply in her lap. "We can rebuild it, Lasla."

"No..." she finally muttered. "Old Terran saying: 'You can't go home again.' We'll excavate the south den, make it bigger and sturdier than this one. Come on, we'd better hurry; it'll be dark soon."

"Lasla?"

"What?" she asked distantly as she picked up a small parfleche and found her flint.

"Why did you help me?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

The answering question took him aback. "Because we are at war. You are not of my race, my family or my cadre... so why?" he demanded as she cracked one of those gray-green round things against another. She deliberately picked out the pinkish meat it contained, ignoring him and his question. "Lasla? Are you not aware of the fact that helping me could be construed as an act of treason by your own people?"

"So?"

"So?" Taelor repeated in dismay. "You are supposed to be a warrior, dedicated to defending your race, your customs and your people. Do you not feel any sense of duty, of..."

"You talk too much," the woman complained, interrupting him and rising to swing her quiver over her shoulder.

"But you did not answer my question!" Taelor reminded her.

Lasla half-turned to glare at him. "You never give up, do you? Oh, all right. I was lonely -- is that good enough for you? My turn: if we're such sworn enemies, why haven't you strangled me yet?"

"Perhaps I, too, was lonely," Taelor admitted, embarrassed. "But you are still the enemy," he added hastily.

"Course I am," Lasla agreed, striding off. "Just because we're sharing the same hovel, the same food, the same hardships and dangers -- what do we have to base a friendship on? Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" she answered her own question.

They formed an alliance, he deluded himself, of necessity. Perhaps it was. She taught him to hunt with bow and arrow and he learned that although she excelled in it, she really did need him. Lasla, according to his standards, was shockingly weak. She was incapable of carrying her own weight in meat after slaying it, and many times other predators had driven her from her own kill. For a Lord of the Universe, he made an excellent beast of burden - but the day he made his own kill was one he would never forget.

Lasla whooped in delight as the browsing doe stumbled and fell; she threw both arms about him in exuberant joy before darting away in the calf-deep snow to slit the dying animal's throat. Taelor, watching her run, stumble, fall, flounder and rise to her feet again and again, still laughing, could only wonder at her vitality. She was already washing the bright, hot blood from her hands when he reached her side. Mischievously, she scooped a handful of snow to throw at him. "Snowball fight! Gotcha!"

She pelted him twice more before he closed with her, pinning her arms with his own as she laughed. Lasla hooked one leg about his, sending them both toppling - laughing - into the snow. The merriness of the moment changed suddenly; for a moment neither moved in that quiet white world as Taelor found his body responding to a primal urge he had not thought possible - certainly not with an alien!

"Taelor?" she whispered huskily, seeing the naked need in his eyes, one arm going around his neck, caressing and pulling his face down to hers; her lips brushed his lightly, then pressed. Taelor went rigid with shock as her tongue sought egress into his mouth. He couldn't move, couldn't breathe as the shock of that intrusion registered. Then he was almost throwing her out of his arms as he catapulted to his feet.

"Taelor!"

He ignored her and the note of dismay to wipe his mouth with fresh snow; despite the aching need she had aroused in him, he forced himself to start field dressing the slain animal. The needed food, they had come for food -- now they had food. Anything else was unthinkable. He refused to look at her or speak with her, and she wisely kept silent as he parceled out a share for her to carry.

He strode off purposefully, breaking ground for her without looking back, still angry, still aching with the need - but refusing to give in to her or to himself. Night fell before he caught the first faint whiff of their home fire. When he dropped the meat inside the hatch he had fashioned to protect them from beasts and the cold wind that whistled through their small cave-dwelling, he stopped, waiting and listening; it was not unusual for Lasla to fall slightly behind. He went inside, built up the fire, prepared his meal and ate slowly. Finally he could stand it no longer and went to look.

He found her less than a kilometer away, a small dark shape huddled against a tree. The fine, falling snow had powdered her face, but she was alive. She protested numbly as he pulled her to her feet, and swept her up in his arms to carry her home. Across the darkening rim of night-shadows he heard the first hunting cry, then another - and another. Taelor, with Lasla in his tired aching arms, quickened his pace.

They were almost home when a shape appeared, romping along the periphery of his vision. They were all about him now, huge dark shapes scampering almost playfully through snow and shadows. The pack, sensing the easiness of the kill, came closer, huge tongues lapping at the air as if he had left some taste that only they could sense. He shifted her higher. "Lasla? Lasla! Wake up. We may have to run for it."

She stirred at the sound of his voice, almost seeming to melt into the contours of his arms and chest. "Mmmm... warm..." she mumbled against his neck, her breath hot on his skin.

"Did you hear me, Lasla? We may have to run for it," he repeated, searching for a familiar landmark that would tell him how much farther to safety. A dark shape drifted closer. The thought of dropping her and running for it flitted across his mind. He dismissed it instantly as unworthy of a Romulan warrior as she stirred once more.

"Why don't you love me?" she complained to his neck softly, drowsily content in his arms. "Am I that different from you, Taelor? Hmmm?"

"You talk foolishness," he told her gruffly as one of the dark shapes fell into step behind, trotting easily in the path he had already broken.

"It's not foolishness," Lasla stated firmly with a single purposeness that belied their precarious position. "I want you, Taelor. Don't you want me too? Just a little bit?" she coaxed as he once more tried to shift her to a better carrying advantage. "I've watched you, you know. I've watched you and wanted you. Why don't you want me, Taelor?"

"Shush. We are sworn enemies."

"I'd rather be lovers." Lasla sighed, rubbing her cheek alongside his neck. "Wouldn't you?"

He almost shouted his answer. "Yes! Now do be quiet so I can save my breath for running!" He could smell the lingering trace of fresh-grilled meat, the tang of burning wood, and the beasts smelled it too. They stopped circling to test the unaccustomed smell of smoke as he slipped in the snow, going down to one knee. Taelor staggered up, forcing down his own fear as he marched past a battle-scarred she-wolf who was testing the air in loud sniffs.

He was kneeling the door open when the attack sounded; the wolves were galvanized into action by the imminent escape of their meal. Taelor lashed out with one foot at the gray shape that was snapping at his hide cape. His foot impacted neatly, sending the animal rolling away with a yelp and buying him a precious moment to drop Lasla inside. Another shape hurtled through the air for his throat. He caught and flipped it away, screaming for Lasla to lock and bar the door they had hung to thwart the Grrrr Beasts' visits. Instead, the heavy door was flung open as she stumbled out with a flaming brand in her hand. He used it to drive the pack back and get them both inside and to safety.

She was half-laughing, half-weeping with fright as he secured the door, throwing both arms about him. "We did it, Taelor! We did it!"

"You little fool!" He shook her hard, then pushed her down on the pallet of pelts. "Why didn't you tell me you were losing feeling in your feet? You could have frozen to death! Or worse, been eaten!" he angrily scolded her, stripping her moccasins away to chafe her feet. Slowly they reddened, then warmed between his hands as she wept quietly against the furs. Outside, the hunting howl sounded once again as the predators' courage returned. She jerked upright as something heavy slammed against the door, her eyes wide with fright.

"I thought they'd gone," she squeaked as two or more began scratching vigorously. "Taelor? Hold me?"

He spread both arms and she crept into their dubious safety, shivering violently. "Have I ever told you about my father?" he asked companionably, and started a tale, a tale that would occupy the night and hopefully hold her fears at bay. Toward morning, the pack, frustrated, went to find easier prey, and Taelor, his arms aching horribly, eased back flat and pulled a pelt over both of them. His last conscious thought was a phrase, a memory: "Dear Mom, guess what's been sleeping in my bed?"

Almost as if on cue, Taelor nodded off to sleep, leaving the two delegates sitting in the moonlight. Worried, James Kirk started to reach for his wrist, then noted the even rise and fall of his chest, and settled back, squirming to a more comfortable position on the hard bench. He toyed with the idea of leaving, then thought better of it; they had not been dismissed and a quiet departure, leaving their host cat-napping, might be construed as an insult. Still, he wished Lord Taelor would wake up and either finish the tale or tell them to go away. Then he had an absolutely horrible thought, *What if he never awoke?*

It was enough to make him forget the ache in his back, and despite the breeze, he felt sweat form, dripping

down the curve of his spine. In the three weeks they had been here, they had been pointedly ignored by all but the attendants who had been assigned to them. They had spent hour after hour waiting in the ante-chambers of the Assembly for a chance to speak on behalf of the Federation. The Romulans they had encountered left little doubt in his mind that they were here on sufferance, with the Praetor's wishes only - but this was not an absolutely monarchy. For a moment, he almost asked Spock to calculate their chances of getting back across the Neutral Zone if the old man were to die before negotiations were completed.

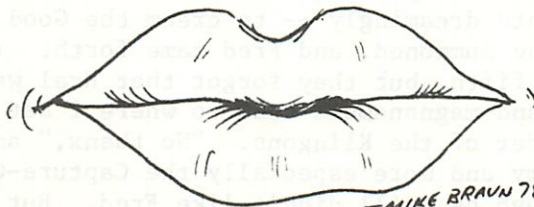
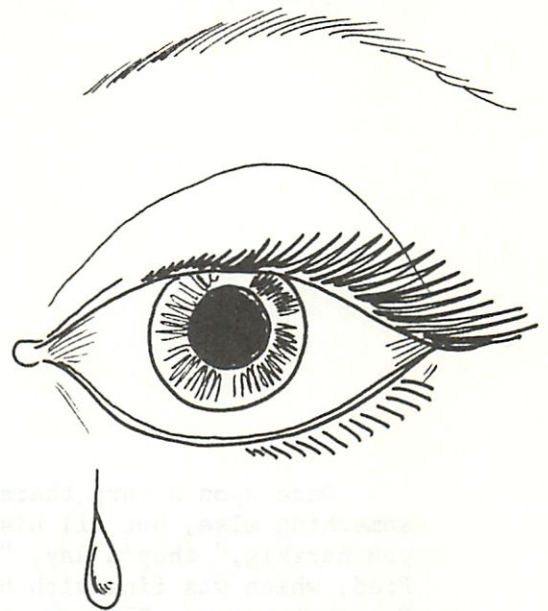
Spock touched his hand; Taelor was stirring. The white-haired Romulan lifted his head to look once more at the tomb. "She was a remarkable woman - in more ways than I can recount. We were rescued by my own people and she lived out her life here. It was she who asked that if ever there were a chance for peace, real peace, between our people, that I take that chance." He leaned forward slightly to tap the human on the knee. "Tomorrow, when the Assembly meets, walk in and demand the Right of the Petitioner. We may be a proud and stiff-necked people, but we are not stupid. If you do this, they will listen, and soon, perhaps, there will be no need of a Neutral Zone. Sleep well, my young friend."



Captain's Lady

No letter again today.
It's been six months since last I heard
And then it was a tape so short
that it wasn't worth the postage.
I know he's busy. That ship of his
keeps him so. She's in his blood.
She blinds him to all others
Even as she binds him to herself.
Yes, he has much on his mind,
this son of mine. Of mine?
Mine no longer. I suppose the old saying's so,
"A daughter's a daughter all of her life
But a son's only a son 'til he takes a wife."

L. Jeanne Powers

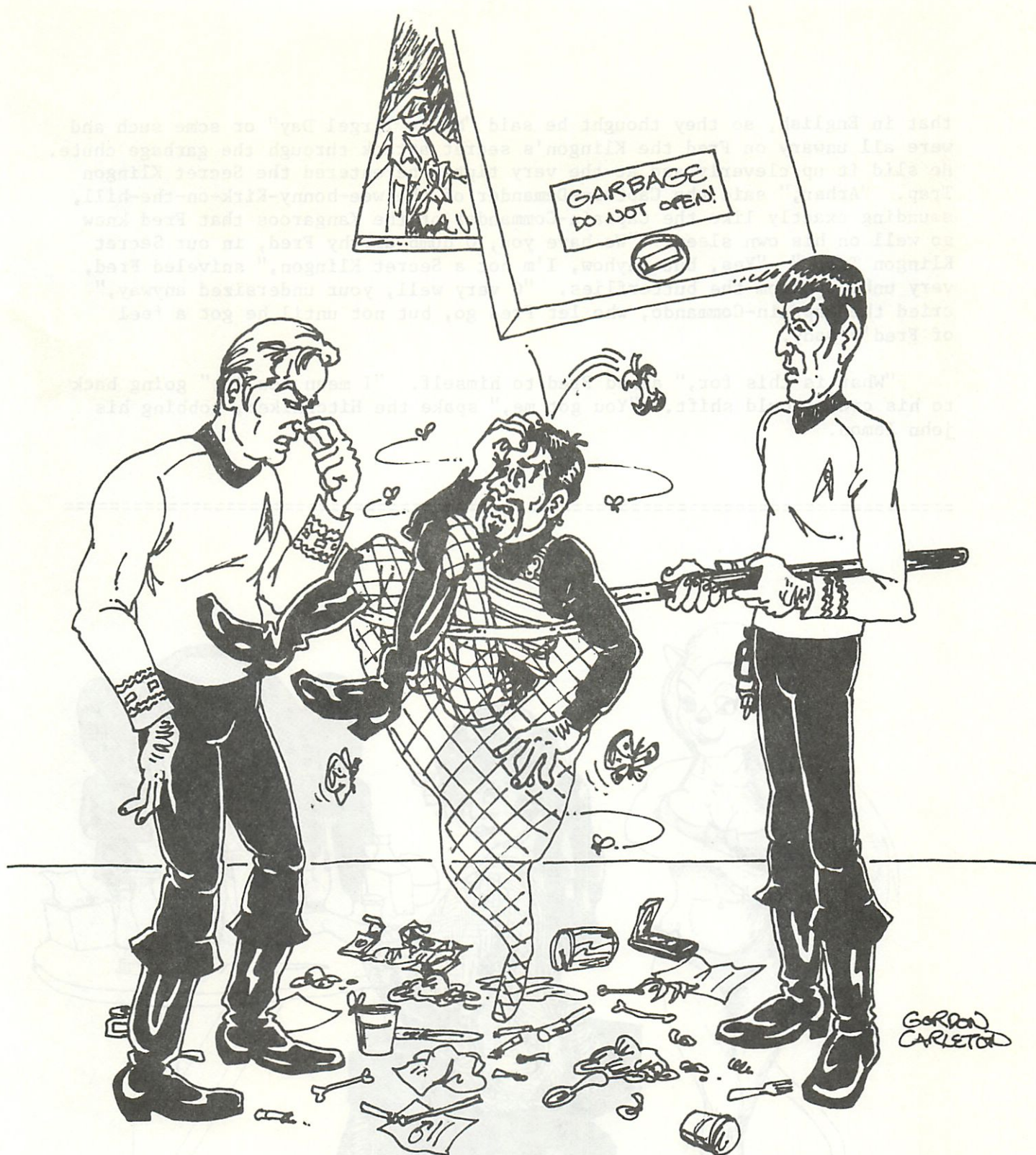


FRED THE KLINGON

by Paula Smith

Once upon a tarp there was a Klingon named Fred, actually his name was something else, but all his little Klingon buddies called him Fred. "Fred, you narfkig," they'd say, "why don't you go drown yourself." Nobody liked Fred, which was fine with him, becost he didn't like anyone else either. For that matter, Klingons think it is a Good Thing not to be liked. "How lucky I am, really, not to be liked," thought Fred, picking his toenails several times a day.

One thing else he especially did not like was the Army, and so he was drafted into the service with the rest of his little Klingons buddies, who also weren't too crazy about the Army, or Fred, either, for that matter, which was as usual. Well, Fred did his service on his crummy ould ship as well as can be expected, until one bright day that would have fallen in July, if Klingons observed such things, Fred and his crummy ould ship came across the famous Good Ship Big E on yet another Neutral Zone Violation. "Arhar" cunningly said the commander of the crummy ould ship. "This is the opportunity that which about I and every Klingon Commander in the entire verfum-melt Empire lies awake nights dreamingly -- to cream the Good Ship Big E. Summon Fred the Klingon," he summoned, and Fred came forth. (Some have said dumbly that Fred came fifth, but they forgot that Kral was already there.) "This is a vital and magnanamous task to where I set thee, Fred," exhaled the Captain-Commander of the Klingons. "No thanx," answered Fred mightily, who hated the Army and more especially the Capture-Commander, who liked Fred's body, though he still didn't like Fred. But there was to no avail because El Captain Klingons' shoved Fred out the airlock in his farts to sneak upon the Good Ship Big E which he did, because he hated the



very stink and thought of Terra even more than the filth of the Captain Queeg Klingon. "I hate that old fart," he whispered, but no one could tell whom he meant, the Catapult-November Climbon or the Bug Ghee, because there was no one there, and even if there were, no one wanted to listen to rotten old Fred.

So anyway, one day Fred came to the Big E door and knocked politely. "Go away, we gave at the office," snarled the fat-bellied Captain-Commander of the Terran ship. "I won't either," screamed Fred, but he didn't very nicely say

that in English, so they thought he said "Merry Tirgel Day" or some such and were all unwary on Fred the Klingon's secret attack through the garbage chute. He slid it up cleverly and at the very tiptoe he entered the Secret Klingon Trap. "Arhar," said the Captain-Demander of the wee-bonny-Kirk-on-the-hill, sounding exactly like the Captain-Commander of the Kangaroos that Fred knew so well on his own sleep. "We have you, O dumb dirty Fred, in our Secret Klingon Trap." "Yes, but anyhow, I'm not a Secret Klingon," sniveled Fred, very unhappy from the butterflies. "O very well, your undersized anyway," cried the Captain-Commando, who let Fred go, but not until he got a feel of Fred's body.

"What is this for," asked Fred to himself. "I mean really," going back to his crummy ould shift. "You got me," spake the Hitchhiker, gobbing his john lemon.

=====



FIFTY KINDS OF MAKEUP, HA! ALL I
NEED IS TWO KINDS OF SHAMPOO!

Strange bald hides, distressing in their nakedness,
Paws with digits like long worms, twisting --
Oh, mother, I am so frightened!
I know you told me before I left Cait
that I would have to adjust, and I agreed
(All the while thinking how exciting to see
New places, have new experiences, meet new beings)
But I didn't know - didn't think - didn't realize
How terrifyingly *strange* it would be.
Nothing is familiar.
I am the only person in a world of monsters.
(Each night I pray to the Mother-of-All
To let me awaken safe at home
And every morning before I open my eyes
I permit myself to hope that she has answered.
If she has, the answer is no.)

But I will not slink home in defeat!
If nothing else, I have my pride
And it freezes my feet in mid-flight.
I cannot go. This was *my* decision
And I must pay its price.
I will face all with as much courage
As I have within me
And someday
I will lead my people to the stars.

L. Jeanne Powers

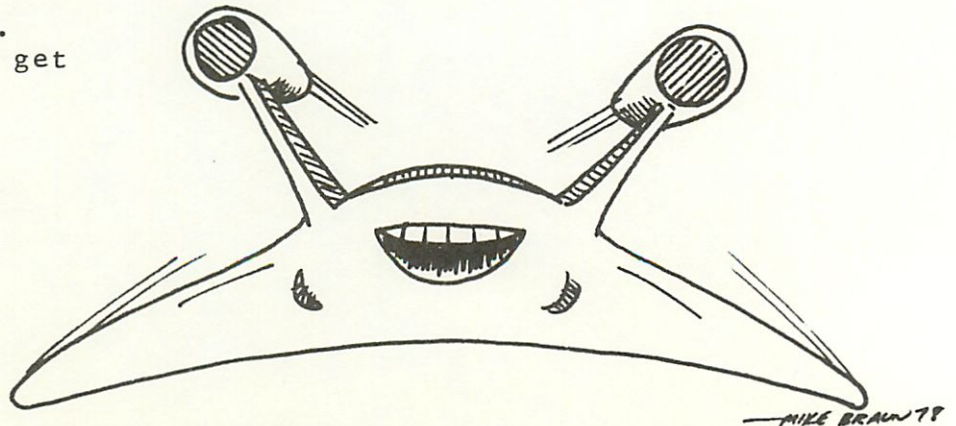
M'RESS: *Starfleet Cadet*



HUNGERS

Ellen L. Kobrin

Could you ever believe that
sometimes even I get
homesick?
I long to leave these sterile
confines and cold clean
lines of my
ship
And return to the
blue sky and green
grass of Earth;
To doff the gold
responsibility
And wear the silver
moonlight and golden
sun in its
place.
I don't even really
need a beach.
In fact, I'd rather
have the smells and
sounds and sights of
childhood.
Did you ever smell
hay, my friend?
Did you ever swim naked in a
cold clean creek?
Did you ever...no, I
guess you didn't.
And I really don't expect
you to understand.
It's enough that you're so
patient with my midnight
ramblings.
And tomorrow I'll still be the
strong, efficient, powerful Starship
Captain, this life I love,
My memories and longings back where
they belong.
And so it must be,
so it should be.
But sometimes even I get
homesick.



THE LOST COLONY

by *johanna
cantor*

Captain's Log, Stardate 3911.3. Barely one day into our investigation of the ruins on the smaller land mass of planet K623-2, the Enterprise has been summoned to Barnard 4, where a fungal infestation threatens all animal life, including the pre-intelligent Duckbills. Though top-priority, the decontamination will not require a full crew. Therefore, in view of the many assignments still to be carried out in this sector, I have transferred command of the ship to Chief Engineer Scott. He will implement the necessary procedures with the help of Lieutenant McGillicutty, acting head of life sciences, and return here within three standard days.

My reasons for remaining with the landing party are not, perhaps, the most defensible. Yet, everything about this place speaks eloquently of an advanced civilization, recently viable. We have found this concrete shelter, evidences of agriculture, and even one human cadaver, carefully buried about 100 standard years ago. Computer note: excavation report to be appended. But the planet is empty, except for ourselves. Sensors have discovered no life forms higher than a mammal like the Terran baboon. The people who built and farmed here have vanished without a trace.

Spock and Archeologist Owa agree that we have stumbled across the remains of a colony, sent out from an advanced human civilization. But where did the colonists go? There are no signs of distress, no unburied remains, no --

"Captain!"

Spock's voice carried an unusual undertone of excitement. Kirk switched off his recorder and sped across the room. "You got it to work?"

"Yes, sir. And the tapes are playable."

"Proceed."

Spock flicked a switch. "It is audio only, Captain," he reminded.

"Right." Kirk listened intently.

September 25, 2123. Horton reporting. Ten days ago, Captain Connors reported --

"Horton! Connors!" Kirk interrupted excitedly. "Spock, we've found the Arcadian Expedition!"

Spock depressed the hold button on the antique machine. "It seems probable, Captain."

"Call the others." Kirk waited until the entire landing party had gathered around, and then nodded to Spock.

September 25, 2123. Horton reporting. Ten days ago, Captain Connors reported that the ion storms which drove the Ilia off course also weakened her so severely that there was no hope of reaching Arcadia. The only class M planet within reach was the second in the drone-mapped K623 system. We proceeded here. All personnel and supplies were brought down, and a message was sent to Space Central. Then, because it was only a matter of time before the Ilia exploded, we rigged her to self-destruct on the far side of the planet. We are marooned here, and who knows when, if ever, Space Central will find us.

"Subspace radio was invented three years later," Owa muttered to herself.

However, we set out to colonize a world. We have supplies, seeds, tools and housing. We have each other.

Since this cave is an adequate temporary shelter, our first priority will be --

"Skip forward, Spock," Kirk ordered. "See if you can find the last entry."

"Yes, sir." Moments later, a woman's voice, high pitched and frightened, sounded from the grid.

There are only 12 of us left now. Last night, Dmitri Savva insisted that the women and children sleep inside the shelter, while the remaining men kept watch outside. There was no sound -- no warning. I was awake, and heard Dmitri call 4 o'clock and all well. The call for 5 o'clock never came. At dawn, all the men were gone -- vanished -- just like the others. The rest of us are searching, but we will not find them. It has been a month since the first group disappeared, and we have never found a trace of them. We will stay inside the shelter tonight, and every night. But I am convinced it is only a matter of time.

The recorded click of the off switch sounded, then the tape wound silently, unused and mute. The party watched, dumbfounded, until Spock reached past Kirk to switch it off.

Kirk gave himself a mental shake. "Owa! Listen through the reports. Record everything they knew about what happened to them. Mr. Spock, Mr. Sulu, Mr. Garrovick, come with me."

For the rest of the day, the party searched the area. They found the cave that had sheltered the colonists at first. They found further evidences of fields once cleared for planting. They found building projects, with tools and moldering materials neatly stacked. But of the colonists themselves, they found no trace.

"Everything is neat," Garrovick observed edgily.

"As if they downed tools for the night," Sulu amplified, "but never came back the next morning."

Kirk shivered. "Let's get back to the shelter. Maybe Owa can tell us something."

Owa was watching for them in the entrance of the shelter, communicator in hand. She smiled and waved as she saw them coming back, but then she hurried to meet them.

"Report, Owa."

"The colonists were here about six months in all, Captain. They settled in quickly and even got some crops planted. But about two months after their arrival, people started to disappear. At first, they were families who'd rigged their own tents away from the main group -- they just wouldn't show up for breakfast. After the second incident, Horton ordered the colony to re-group, and everybody slept in the cave. But on November 30th - they kept the old calendar, sir - they woke up to find that half the colony had disappeared during the night, including Horton.

"Jane Carrothers took command, and from then on, they spent most of the daylight hours searching for the missing colonists. They searched the forest inch by inch and never found a trace. On December 10th, 30 more people, including Carrothers, disappeared. That's when Savva ordered the remaining colonists down here. That night, the rest of the men went -- that's the entry you heard. It's the last one."

Owa shivered, and Kirk squeezed her arm reassuringly. But they were all looking around in silence at the beautiful, empty land.

"This would never do, the captain thought. "Analysis?" he barked.

Spock was ready, of course. "Logically, Captain, over 100 people do not simply vanish."

"Therefore?"

"Therefore, they either removed themselves, or they were removed. The fact that none of them, including the colony's leaders, seems to have made contact over a period of months with the group left behind would indicate the latter."

"Agreed. But how? Who?"

"The Vegans still held the quadrant then," Sulu volunteered.

"That's right," Garrovick's voice vibrated with indignation. "And it's just the kind of trick the Vegans would have pulled. Taking a colony a few at a time, as they needed them, and then coming back for more."

"Did their tricorders have the Kornfeld, Owa?"

"No, sir. They only had 180s."

"Then an alien could have beamed up any part of the colony, and there'd have been no way they could have detected the residuals."

"Correct," Spock agreed. "The destruction of the Ilia could have led the Vegans directly here."

"Where they found a nice crop of fodder," Kirk finished grimly, "just waiting to be harvested."

"Those poor people," Garrovick mused sadly.

"All right." Kirk shook off his depression. "We'll spend the night in the shelter. Owa. Garrovick. Test the well, and purify it if necessary. Sulu, how's your cooking arm?"

"Ready and willing, Captain!"

"And Spock--" Kirk hesitated, feeling slightly foolish, then deciding to go ahead. "Rig a force field around the shelter. I'm sure it's unnecessary, but--"

"Right away, Captain." The others scattered.

The evening passed pleasantly. Kirk helped Spock place the generators, and rig an alarm to the tricorder. Then the whole party sat down to eat, feeling safe for the first time in hours.

"Mmm," Kirk said appreciatively. "Mr. Sulu, you missed your calling. Anybody who can get this kind of meal out of portables--"

"It's just a knack," Sulu disclaimed, but his eyes twinkled. The party cleared up cheerfully, and settled down to the task of analyzing, classifying, and dictating the day's finds.

When the long twilight faded, Kirk ordered watches. No one objected. In fact, he had four volunteers for the unpopular first watch. Taking it himself, he ordered the rest to bed.

Kirk's watch was uneventful. He transferred to Owa, and thereafter slept soundly, only waking automatically at the end of each period to hear the turnover. Then it was the end of Sulu's watch, and dawn. Relieved, Kirk attached his equipment and joined the lieutenant. A moment later, Spock was with them.

"No ghoulies," Kirk smiled, whispering so as not to waken Owa and Garrovick.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Captain," Sulu teased. "I'll fetch water. I could use some coffee."

"Me, too."

Spock switched off the generators, and the three stepped outside. Sulu grabbed an empty expandible, and picked his way down the overgrown path to the well. Kirk inhaled deeply, enjoying the soft, fresh air. "We'd better concentrate on the assays today, Spock. It's unquestionably a colonizable planet, but Starfleet will want the tests."

"Agreed, Captain. I will--"

A harsh scream interrupted him. Kirk drew his phaser and charged down the path. Spock paused only to grab a weapon, shouting to Owa and Garrovick. Then he sped after the captain. They halted together at the edge of the old well. Its cover was off. The empty expandible lay beside it. But Sulu was gone.

"Sulu!" Kirk yelled. "Sulu!"

There was no answer.

"Spock, get back to the shelter. Get your equipment, and get back here on the double."

"You must not stay alone, Cap--"

"That's an order," Kirk snapped. Spock still hesitated, then turned as Owa and Garrovick came crashing down the path.

"What happened?" Garrovick demanded.

"Owa, stay with Spock. Keep him covered. Garrovick, come with me."

"Yes, sir."

In the forest ahead, Kirk could hear the sounds of nervous animals. Birds called warnings; the baboons chattered in anger. Kirk and Garrovick ran toward the noise. But whatever was ahead kept well ahead of them.

"Captain!" Spock shouted from behind them.

"Here!" Kirk and Garrovick slowed down, letting the other two catch up. "What have you got?" Kirk demanded.

"A life form of considerable mass, moving rapidly. And one human, moving with it."

"Direction."

"Bearing 127. Toward the cave."

"All hands!" Garrovick's phaser cleared a path, and they set out at a trot. "Is it still on this heading?"

"Yes, sir. But moving at three times our speed."

Kirk grunted in annoyance; but the cave was not far ahead. He pressed on, almost at Garrovick's heels. But then Spock slowed, and stopped, shaking his head. Kirk walked back to him. This was what he'd feared. "The rock," he stated flatly.

"Yes, Captain. A natural shielding."

"All right. It's got to be in the cave. Are there other entrances?"

"The colonists found one other," Owa answered. "Three kilometers from the first, at bearing 161."

"Higher than the mouth?" Spock demanded.

"There's no time for geology," Kirk snapped. "Garrovick, you and Owa get to the second entrance. Double time. Mr. Spock and I will enter here. Contact us when you're in position."

"Acknowledged." Within moments, the two were out of sight in the forest.

"Keep trying, Spock," Kirk said as he cleared their way.

"Yes, sir."

"How the devil does anything move so fast through this vegetation?"

"It left no trail," Spock pointed out.

"A winged creature?"

"Strongly indicated. Unless it--"

"There's the cave!" Kirk opened his communicator. "Kirk to Garrovick." There was no answer. "Garrovick. Come in. Owa!" He whirled. "Spock!"

Spock was already checking the tricorder. He shook his head. "I read no human life within range, Captain," he reported.

Kirk stood still, stunned; then anger galvanized him. "They've got to be in the cave. Come on!"

Hours later, they stood at the cave's smaller entrance. "Almost noon," Kirk muttered, looking at the sky. "Damn it, they've got to be here!"

"Yes, sir. And since we have searched the entire surface--" Spock's voice trailed off.

"Underground!" Kirk exclaimed. Then he realized that Spock was staring into middle distance, frowning slightly. The captain shut up, and waited hopefully.

"Captain," Spock said at length, "I believe we could modify the M-probe to--"

"The M-probe!" Kirk said in surprise. "That won't indicate life functions."

"No, sir. But we could modify it to probe the thickness of these walls."

It took Kirk a moment. "You think there's a concealed access point."

"Yes, sir. Camouflaged by the natural rock, since the tricorder detected nothing. But the M-probe--"

"Let's go."

At first Kirk simply followed Spock's directions, working on hope and faith. Then he began to see what they were doing. "Mr. Spock, if we get out of this, I owe you a drink!"

"Thank you, Captain," Spock replied absently, tightening a connection. Kirk left him to it, and went to rig a distress beacon. Then he picked up his recorder, and rapidly dictated the day's events. "Mr. Spock has modified the M-probe to enable us to scan the cave," he concluded. "Although the Enterprise will return within 36 hours, that may be too late for the missing crew. We will re-enter the cave at the large entrance, and proceed to the second mouth, marking our progress with phaser blazes."

"Completed, Captain."

Kirk switched off the log. "We'll take all the powerpacks we can carry. We may have to blast." Spock was already breaking them out.

The modified probe worked, but only over a limited area. At first, Kirk allowed his anxiety to push him, as though he could will the process to speed up. Then he settled down to the slow task; strangely, the work seemed to go faster.

"Halfway through," he remarked. "It's been solid so far -- what is it?"

"Here. In the floor, Captain. A large, circular -- Cap--!"

Spock's shout was cut off in the middle. Kirk grabbed for his phaser, but he never reached it. Something was crushing him, almost suffocating him. He felt a sharp pain, then nothing more.

Awareness returned slowly. Lying still, Kirk took a cautious inventory. There was no pain as the numbness faded. He listened intently, but there was no sound. He tried to sense his equipment belt without moving, but the surface under his back was hard and smooth. Finally he opened his eyes; he was looking up at the ceiling of the cave. He tried to move his head, and gave an involuntary grunt. He was pinned fast.

"Captain!" Spock's voice sounded comfortingly close. "Captain Kirk! Are you all right?"

"I think so." He tried to lift his head again. "What the hell?"

"It is a gigantic web, Captain, not unlike a spider's net. Remarkably adhesive."

"I'll say." But Spock was sitting up, so Kirk tugged one hand free. Spock grasped it, and pulled Kirk to a sitting position. "It's like flypaper!" Kirk exclaimed.

"Exactly."

"Any sign of the others?"

"No, Captain. We seem to be alone."

Kirk looked around curiously. "Where are we? Inside the cave?"

"Under it, I think. The temperature is lower than the surface temperature."

"So it is. Look. The web ends over there, by that slope. Let's see if we can get off it."

They soon found that by pulling each other they could inch their way across the web. It was slow, hard work, but they could travel.

"We're getting there," Kirk panted.

Spock reached for him again, then halted. "Look, Captain! On the surface." Kirk looked at the area Spock indicated. There, under the web, were traces of a wide phaser blaze.

"Our crew!"

"No, Captain. Look at those lichens. They must have grown undisturbed for decades."

Kirk's hopes sank. "The colonists," he concluded bleakly. "This is what happened to them."

Spock nodded, then reached for him again.

"What time is it?" Kirk grunted.

"1630." Spock gave a powerful heave, gaining centimeters.

"Good." The edge loomed invitingly, less than two meters away. "We can't have been out too long."

"Two hours. Just long enough to entrap us."

"They call a force field a prisoner's web," Kirk panted. "This looks like the real--"

"Listen!"

Kirk listened intently. Then he heard it. Footsteps! Coming toward them. Alarmed, he gave another heave. Spock positioned himself for his pull, then halted in astonishment.

A procession of humans entered the room, walking in easy formation, two by two. Kirk studied them, struck by their air of gentle contentment. Then he began to count. Two, four, six, eight -- on and on they came. Men, women and children. The early arrivals were laying strips of padding on the cave floor. Kirk registered the pads as antique sleepers, but he kept counting. 108, 110 -- "Sulu!"

Sulu looked up at Kirk's yell, and waved and smiled before sitting down with the others. Kirk stared at him, then turned back in time to see Garrovick and Owa step through the entrance. Owa was smiling up at the tall lieutenant, and he put an arm around her, drawing her close. They halted in the doorway, oblivious of the group and of Kirk's shouts. Then something shoved them gently, and they walked amiably over to join the group.

"Garrovick!" Kirk was still shouting. "Owa! Can you hear me? Sulu -- What the hell is that?"

Spock did not reply. He too was staring at the creature that loomed in the entrance, easing its way through the opening.

After a moment, Kirk managed to stop staring, and observe. "It looks like a giant insect," he whispered.

"Yes, sir." Spock's whisper was composed, helping Kirk listen. "Observe, Captain. A segmented exoskeleton."

"And look at those leg joints. No wonder we couldn't catch it. Look!"

The creature was stepping carefully among the unconcerned humans, distributing neat mounds of a whitish

substance. "Is it secreting that stuff?" Kirk demanded.

Spock pulled away to get a better sight line. "Yes, sir." His tone still held nothing but scientific interest. Kirk braced himself as the creature came toward them. It halted, antennae extended. Then it moved closer, standing almost at a level with them. "If I could only reach it," Spock murmured, "I might--"

Almost as if he heard him, the creature reared, balancing on its hind legs. It held small green packages -- neat, familiar shapes -- and flipped them to the Enterprise men.

"Survival cubes!" Kirk exclaimed. "They look like our own supplies."

"They must be ours, Captain, since Complemen did not come into use until 2253."

Satisfied, Kirk ate a cube, still keeping one eye on the insect. "At least they're treating us well," he observed. "Spock -- Spock!"

Spock was frozen in concentration, his palms placed flat on the oblivious insect's leg. His face furrowed. Kirk caught his breath, torn between fear for Spock's safety, and curiosity as to what he might find out. He saw the Vulcan quiver. Then Spock gave a choked cry, and collapsed.

"Spock!" Kirk yelled. He tore loose from one part of the web, only to be entangled immediately in another. He tore free again, and reached his unconscious officer, feeling for a neck pulse. There was no respiration; bending, he forced air into the still form. In. Out. In. Out.

The creature moved back, breaking the contact it did not seem to have noticed. It studied the two figures for a moment, then reached for Kirk. Suddenly Kirk was ripped off the web, then flipped. He flew through the air, back to the far end of the web, landed hard, and stuck fast. The creature pressed Spock's body carefully down against the adhesive webbing. Then it backed down to the main level, and moved regally out the door.

Kirk concentrated, and pulled. He freed one arm, and then the other, then with a tremendous effort, made it to his knees. Spock lay only a few meters away, but that was an eternity away. The Vulcan was still motionless, but as Kirk watched, he suddenly drew a gasping breath.

"Thank God," Kirk said aloud. His voice sounded enormous in the silent chamber. The group of humans looked at him in surprise. Sulu smiled, and waved.

"Sulu," Kirk called to him. "Sulu!" The lieutenant waved again, then settled back to his contented abstraction. "Sulu!" Frustration lent an edge to Kirk's voice. "Sulu!" Something in the helmsman responded, and he got to his feet, moving slowly toward the ledge.

"Sulu! Get me off here! Maybe those mats. If you could put them over the webbing, you could--"

Sulu smiled. "They'll take care of you, Captain," he promised lazily. "You'll be all right." He turned back to the group.

"Sulu!" Kirk changed tactics. "Sulu, look at Spock! He's unconscious. Maybe in shock. He's got to be kept warm. Sulu!"

Sulu hesitated, then scrambled up the grade. From the edge of the webbing, he peered over at Spock, studying him with concern. After a long moment, he slid down, ambled over to pick up one of the mats, and returned slowly to the edge.

"Attaboy," Kirk said eagerly.

Sulu lay the mat on the webbing with care. Slowly, he got another mat and a cover, and climbed onto the first. He lay the second mat down, and now he could just reach Spock. He grasped the Vulcan's wrists, and pulled with all his strength. The strain delineated the muscles of his hands and neck, but finally the limp body came free of the webbing. Tenderly, Sulu lay Spock on the mat and covered him. Then he crawled in next to him and pulled the first officer close, cradling his head.

"Sulu!" Kirk shouted. But Sulu only snuggled down, smiling comfortably.

Betrayed, Kirk stared at him. Then he looked around. The other humans were settling too -- bedding children down, curling up under covers. Kirk scanned the group, looking desperately for Garrovick or Owa. A flash of red caught his eye, but the room began to darken.

"Sulu!" Kirk shouted. "Sulu, where are you?"

"I'm here, Captain. Just go to sleep. You're all right."

Kirk pulled himself loose, heading for the voice. He called again, but Sulu did not answer. Again and again he pulled himself free and stuck again, until he could no longer remember why he was struggling. He stopped fighting. After a time, he slept.

A gentle light diffused through the chamber, beautifying everything it touched. Jim woke. Lazily, he tried to stretch. Something held him fast, but it didn't matter. He lay still, contentedly watching the play of the

light. Someone would come. And soon, one of the Gatherers came to him. It pulled him off the web, setting him free at the edge. Spock still slept. The Gatherer lifted him off the mat, pressing him back onto the web. But it made no objection when Jim picked up the cover and threw it over his friend. Spock must be very tired, Jim thought. But now he could rest, and be comfortable.

Jim shared breakfast with Sulu, and joined the other Caretakers in their work. His friends showed him what to do. It was not hard. The work went quickly and pleasantly. It seemed only minutes before the Gatherer returned. Jim looked at Sulu.

"Lunch," Sulu explained happily.

"Good," Jim said. "I'm hungry." His voice broke the tranquility, sounding strange even to his own ears. He smiled apologetically at the other Caretakers, and fell into step with their easy pace.

Spock was awake, struggling at the edge of the web. Jim went to him, pulled him free, and embraced him joyfully. The Vulcan stiffened, looking at his friend in horror. Jim studied him in turn, vaguely disturbed. Then he remembered. Dear Spock. The loyal one, the trustworthy one. The dear friend. But showing his love embarrassed him so. Jim rubbed Spock's arm, to show he understood, and sat down. The Vulcan sat down next to him, but he still seemed uneasy, so Kirk shifted over to put an arm around his shoulders. "You'll be all right," he reassured him, and gave the taut body a hug.

The Gatherer brought them their lunch, then moved away. Kirk looked after it with affectionate gratitude, raising his food to his mouth. But Spock grabbed his wrist, whispering urgently. Jim tried to understand, for it was clear that his friend was upset. But why was he speaking so fast? There was nothing to worry him so.

Spock reached over, then gently removed the food from Jim's hand. Now Jim understood. Of course. Spock had slept through breakfast. He must have been very tired. But now he was hungry. "Take mine," Jim said generously, and stretched out near the edge of the web for a little siesta.

When the Gatherer returned, Kirk held out his arms to be lifted down the slope. Spock, too, got to his feet, and held out his arms. The Gatherer lifted him down, setting him among the other Caretakers. Jim gave Spock's arm a welcoming squeeze, and they strolled back to work. This time he showed Spock what they must do. It was good to have his dear friend by his side.

But as the light changed, Jim began to feel strange. The work was growing hard. Spock still worked beside him, helping his friend up the rises, taking the heavier loads. Jim smiled at him. Dear Spock. Always the loyal one. But time was slowing down. The rises stretched endlessly. If only he could remember what he was supposed to do. Someone put a load of greenish material in his arms. Kirk stared at it in total non-recognition.

"Captain?"

"Spock!" It was almost a whimper. Blessedly, Spock was at his side. The Vulcan whispered urgently.

"Captain, you must not speak. Do as I do. If the insects realize we are not drugged, they will put us back on the web."

"The web?"

"Shh." One of the insects was coming toward them, bringing more of the greenish stuff. Kirk slipped behind Spock, trying to control a shudder. Now he remembered. The web. His futile struggles. How had he gotten here? He could hardly wait until the creature moved away.

"Spock!" he entreated.

"You were drugged, Captain. I think it is in the food. We can talk when we are alone." Spock turned back to the work, and Kirk imitated him. He didn't know what to do, but Spock hid Kirk's clumsiness. Gradually, Kirk figured out what they were doing. Terran ants were organized like this, he mused. Huge colonies, with fungus crops tended by other insect species who lived in symbiotic relationship to the ant colony. Only here the farming was done by humans. Human beings enslaved by -- Kirk swallowed the thought. Drugged, Spock had said. But apparently repeated dosages were required. He was all right now. Unless something was wrong with his time sense; it seemed they had been working forever.

But at last an insect was coming toward them, and the humans were stopping work. They moved off casually. Only Spock's hand on his arm saved Kirk from striding out of the farm. Reminded, he checked himself, and ambled along with the group. In the chamber, he and Spock got a mat, and sat down.

One of the insect guards moved through the group, distributing food. "You must pretend to accept the food, and hide it, Captain," Spock whispered.

"All right." Kirk played his role well, he rather thought, holding the repulsive stuff up to his face until the insect turned away. But it was just as well that the creature paid little attention to its charges' behavior.

Kirk buried the repulsive stuff under a mat. Spock hid his portion under his waistband, grimacing at the sensation. "Ugh," Kirk shuddered.

"We will need it for analysis, Captain."

"Yes, of course. How long was I out of it?"

"Only part of one day."

"Then the Enterprise will get here tonight?"

"2300, if she's on schedule."

"The distress beacon will bring them down in a hurry. If we can get out of here now, can we find the way out?"

"Unlikely, Captain. This area is honeycombed with passages."

"And it's black as pitch. But we'd have the advantage of surprise."

"I do not think so. Probably we would get lost, be re-captured, and put back on the web."

"Yes. They overpowered us so quickly. Did they knock you out too?"

"Yes, sir. Some sort of nerve blocker, it appears."

"Then you don't know the way either."

"I believe, Captain, that our best plan would be to wait until light. The farming area is very near the surface. And if we act drugged, they will not be expecting us to escape."

"Right," Kirk agreed reluctantly. "Damn. I'm hungry."

"Naturally. How long does it stay dark?"

"I don't know." They sat in silence.

After a while, Kirk turned to watch the colonists. These must be the descendants of the original group, he thought. None of them seemed very old. Lord. That meant none of them had known any life but this. Could they talk -- or think? Probably not. If he got out of this, he mused, his problems were just beginning.

A red shirt among the colonists' drab jumpsuits caught his eye. Kirk recognized Garrovick and then Owa. As he watched them, Garrovick began to undress the girl, tenderly and appreciatively. Soon they were making love, oblivious to the group around them. Damn, Kirk thought. I hope they've had their shots. Then he looked away, turning so quickly that he caught Spock rubbing his temples.

"What's wrong?"

Spock straightened immediately. "Nothing, Captain. I--"

"Look at me." Kirk studied his first officer carefully. "You don't feel well, do you? What is it?"

Spock shrugged, then stiffened. But Kirk had seen the slight shiver.

"Cold? Here." He scrambled over to get a cover, and brought it to the Vulcan. "Put this around you. Did you make contact with that insect last night?"

"I think so," Spock replied uncertainly, pulling the cover around his shoulders.

"Is it intelligent?"

"Logically, yes. However, I have no telepathic evidence on that point."

"What happened?"

"I cannot be sure. Its mind is so alien that--" Spock broke off.

"All right. Don't try to think about it. Lie down."

"I do not--"

"Consider that an order. Here." Kirk got a second cover. The Vulcan thanked him a bit sheepishly, but he settled back gratefully enough, and closed his eyes.

"All right?"

"That is all I require, Captain."

Kirk sat down. The light was going. Soon it was black. Kirk stood it for about ten minutes. Then he had to fight an impulse to scream. All around him he could hear quiet breathing as the colonists fell asleep. But they were alien -- as alien as the insects who'd enslaved them. Even his own crew. Sulu. Garrovick. Owa. The thought steadied him. They were his responsibility. He began to plan. The Enterprise would be back soon. Maybe she was already in orbit -- drawn back early by the distress beacon. If they could make it out of the cave, they'd soon find a search party. His heart beat faster as he planned his moves. These overgrown ants would soon learn what a starship could do! Finally, he fell asleep.

It seemed a long time before they were taken to the workplace the next morning. But then it was ridiculously easy. They waited until the guard left the group, and followed the path it had taken. Soon they were outside, and in less than ten minutes, they were back at the mouth of the cave.

"Captain!" A young yeoman jumped up joyfully, dropping her tricorder accurately on Scotty's foot. But the

engineer's grunt turned to a shout of joy as he saw them. The girl flipped her communicator open, and the rest of the search party rushed back -- group after group, phasers at the ready. McCoy strode toward them, chattering and scolding. Kirk sensed Spock brace himself, but he cut them off. There was no time for that yet.

"We were captured," he explained curtly. "There's a giant species of insect on this planet. They've enslaved the colonists. We got away, but the rest of the landing party's still down there. Spock--"

Spock was giving the food sample to the yeoman, who held a collecting bag ready. "Coming, Captain."

"Negative. Report to Sickbay."

"With your permission, Captain, our people are still drugged. You may need some way to render them unconscious."

"Sure you're fit?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Yeoman, get that up to the labs. Have it analyzed right away. Tell them it's some kind of tranquilizer, or maybe a hallucinogen. Scotty, you and McCoy stay here with one search party. Surround yourselves with a force-field, and keep weapons at the ready. If we're not back in an hour, come after us. Boma, Leslie, Smithers, Kosciuko -- what's your name?"

"Tonelli, sir."

"You too. Spock, can we get back in without alerting the guards?"

"Unknown, Captain."

"All right. We'll head for the farm. Maybe we can mix with the group and take them by surprise. Mr. Spock?"

"Our crew are still in uniform," Spock took up the briefing. "But like the colonists, they are drugged -- docile to the insects, possibly hostile to us. If you are captured, be sure you eat nothing. If you pretend to eat, and act drugged, you may be able to trick the insects into freeing you."

"Phasers on heavy stun. Formation C. Kosciuko and Boma take the flanks. Move out."

Kirk's stomach tightened as they retraced their steps. But there was no trouble. The group was still working where they'd left it; they hadn't been missed. Sulu, Garrovick, and Owa were working together. They were delighted to see their friends, and happy to keep them company. They had to be hurried along, but they made no objection. In less time than Kirk would have thought possible, they'd rejoined the security party. "Beam up," he ordered. The transporter room took shape around them.

"Bones, get these three to Sickbay. See if you can bring them out of it. Spock, I want a meeting in 15 minutes. Alert the tactical people. We've got to figure out how to save the colonists. Scotty, weapons check-out."

"Captain, we cannot interfere."

"What?" Kirk whirled on his first officer. Spock winced, but stood his ground.

"Our Prime Directive of Non-interference," he said stubbornly.

Kirk considered him for a moment, letting his sudden anger die. "Countermand those orders," he said evenly. "Mr. Spock, come with me." He waited until they were in the turbolift, then froze it. "Do you want to go to Sickbay?"

"No, sir."

"Wrong phrasing. Do you need medical attention?"

"No, sir. I can heal myself."

"All right." He released the lift. "Deck 5. You think the insects are intelligent?"

"Yes, sir."

"On what grounds? Your meld?"

"No. Their mind structure must be wholly different from ours. I could make no contact. But consider, Captain. Our weapons. And survival cubes."

"They drugged our survival rations," Kirk mused. "I see. They must have found, almost 100 years ago, that the colonists wouldn't take the secreted food at first. But they would take their own rations, and they could be drugged that way. The insects learned that. And they remembered it."

"Yes, Captain. And, considering the length of time, almost certainly passed that knowledge on to another generation. It could not have become part of an instinct pattern in that short a period."

"Damn." The doors opened; Spock hesitated. "Come on. I'll walk you to your quarters. Spock, we can't just leave them there. They're human beings!"

"An emotional reaction, Captain. Human beings have been enslaved by many societies, their own as well as

aliens. What kind of life would these people have, apart from the insects?"

The fact that he had wondered the same thing didn't make Spock's comment any more palatable. But Kirk checked his retort. "All right, Mr. Spock. We'll consider it. You rest. Don't report for duty until you're fit. That's an order."

"Acknowledged, Captain." Spock entered his quarters, and Kirk heard the lock engage.

"Is Spock all right?"

Kirk turned. "He says so, Bones."

"He doesn't look it."

"He tried to meld with one of the insects; the effort knocked him out. Apparently it's a wholly different kind of mind structure. But he says all he needs is rest."

McCoy considered a moment. "I'll come back later and check him out," he decided. "Probably I'd just bother him now. Jim, you look exhausted. How long since you've eaten?"

Kirk paused to figure it out.

"Never mind. Just come on." Kirk allowed himself to be herded toward the mess and provided with soup. He wasn't really hungry. What in God's name was he going to do about these people?

"How're Sulu and the others?"

"The lab analyzed that sample and had an antidote ready. They're all asleep now. Should be fine by morning."

That was good news. Kirk ate a spoonful of soup. The taste made him realize that he was very hungry indeed. He programmed a substantial meal, and finished every crumb under McCoy's approving eye. Then he went back for pie and coffee. Maybe things weren't hopeless after all.

"You'd better get some sleep, Jim."

"Bones, what are we going to do about those colonists?"

"I don't entirely understand."

Kirk filled him in, ending with Spock's assessment. "And I'm afraid he's right," he concluded. McCoy snorted. But he had nothing to suggest. "Well, let's sleep on it," Kirk said, rising. "Check on Spock, will you?"

"Right."

Kirk scheduled a meeting of department heads for 0900 and dictated a briefing tape. Climbing into bed, he planned his opening remarks. When you knew what questions to ask, Someone had said, you were well on your way to finding the answers. Well, they had their questions. He just hoped Someone was right.

Kirk woke, rested and ready. The difficulty of the situation still impressed him, but sleep had brought the beginnings of an idea (not that he'd admit that to Bones). He fortified himself with a solid breakfast, and called Sickbay.

"Spock seems all right," McCoy told him immediately. "Last night when I checked him, he was in some sort of trance. About the ninth period he fell asleep -- a little heavier than usual, but normal. He's still sleeping. The other three are back on duty."

"Already? Nice work, Bones. Kirk out." He broke the channel, and switched back to Communications. "Ask Mr. Garrovick and Archeologist Owa to join the meeting in Briefing Room 5," he ordered. The page for Owa was sounding as he entered the corridor. A tight ship, he thought proudly, and strode toward Briefing. But he made sure no trace of the pride appeared as he entered the room. A Captain has standards to maintain.

"You have been briefed on the problem before us," he began, just as Garrovick and Owa came hurrying in, apologizing. Kirk nodded acknowledgment, studying Owa. Why was the little archeologist so pale? He waited until they were settled. "I asked Mr. Garrovick and Ms. Owa to join us since they too were captured by those creatures. Their input may be valuable."

Owa gave an audible sigh; Kirk turned toward her in time to see the "I told you so" look she got from Sulu and Garrovick. Damn. What had the girl expected? A court martial? Or maybe the cat o' nine tails? Civilians! Of course it was impossible for all the personnel to be Service. But was it impossible for non-Service staff to learn that Starfleet was fair? He gave her a meaning look, then continued.

"It seems to me that we cannot leave those people there. Whatever our interference costs them, we must give them and their children, the chance at a normal life, as human beings. Is there any discussion on that?" There was silence.

"No argument, Jim," McCoy said easily. "Just a point of information. The children in the colony can almost certainly be trained. But that may be impossible with the older ones. I can find no record of any adult who's experienced such total deprivation. We can't know until we try. But what we can do, I'm sure, is arrange for the group to be kept together in a protected environment. They can work, be looked after, and be together, just as

they are now. The dislocation should be minimal."

"All right, Doctor. Your department will be responsible for making arrangements for the colony."

"Acknowledged."

"Which brings us to the other problem. The evidence we have is meager, and it may be impossible to get more. Even if a method of communicating with the insects were devised, the effort to do so might be considerably more in violation of the Prime Directive than simply removing the colony. Ms. Janos, does the computer give any useful information?"

"No, sir." Spock's assistant didn't mention that she'd spent the night checking it out. Kirk noted her restraint with approval, but confined himself to a nod. "But--"

"Go ahead."

"Well, sir, if I understand the situation correctly, there were no humans on the planet until a hundred years ago."

"Yes." The captain encouraged her. This was the line of thought he'd begun to follow. Janos went on more confidently.

"The insect society must be millenia old. Therefore, it stands to reason that they must have had some method of farming before the colonists arrived."

"When the colony arrived," Sulu picked up the thread eagerly, "the insects discovered the humans could be tranquilized and used, and gradually captured the whole group, using human labor to replace whatever system they had used before."

"We know they can remember," Kirk added, "and can probably transmit information. Is it reasonable to assume they would replace the colonists with whatever -- yes, Mr. Sulu?"

"Sorry, Captain. I just thought of something. But there's no evidence--"

"Understood."

"Well, sir, there is a life form native to the planet that has humanoid shape."

"The baboons!" Owa exclaimed.

"Is it possible, Doctor?"

"Why, yes, Captain. In fact, given the circumstances, it's even probable. If the insects had a system already in operation for capturing, tranquilizing, and using a humanoid life form, that goes a long way toward explaining how quickly they went about capturing the colonists."

"All right. We have a hypothesis. Recommendations?" No one wanted to speak. "Mr. Garrovick."

Garrovick drew a deep breath. "I don't like the idea," he answered frankly. "But I suppose we'd better make sure the society has alternative food sources before we do anything that could put an end to their farming. And the best way to do that is to go back down."

"Good," Kirk approved. He didn't like the idea either. But-- "We'll have to beam down again. Unless someone can think of any other way to study the society unobtrusively?"

No one spoke for a moment. Then three spoke simultaneously. "Captain, I'll volunteer."

Kirk nodded in acknowledgment, then decided he might as well state the obvious. "It may be possible for those of us who were captured before to infiltrate the colony without alerting the insects. But I'd like Mr. Spock to be in the party."

The door opened, and Spock stepped through, right on cue. "I apologize, Captain, for--"

"No need, Mr. Spock. You were following orders. Come in. We've been discussing--"

"Captain, I believe there is another factor -- one I did not think of last night. There were no humans on that planet until--"

"We're way ahead of you, Mr. Spock. Mr. Sulu, please fill Mr. Spock in. We will reconvene at 1200."

They beamed down to the shelter, where Kirk posted a carefully-briefed security party and set a check-in schedule. Then he ordered the original landing party into formation. Owa was visibly nervous, but she took her place resolutely.

"Scared, Owa?"

She jumped, but managed a smile. "Scared silly," she acknowledged ruefully. "But I guess if I get captured, you'll know where to find me."

"Good girl," Kirk approved, and Sulu laughed, clapping her soundly on the shoulder. Then Garrovick went to

her.

"You'll be okay, Mari," he said, and put an arm around her. It was a declaration -- one which seemed to startle its maker as much as its hearers. But the others remained impassive. Only on the face of the helmsman did a faint smirk appear. Oho, Kirk thought. So that's it.

"Right," he said aloud, as though nothing had happened. "Stay close to her, Mr. Garrovick. Move out."

Kirk nodded to Spock to take the lead, then stepped back to let the young couple follow. Garrovick met his look squarely, but relaxed at Kirk's wink. Outside, he grabbed Owa's hand, euphorically hurrying along until she almost had to trot to keep up with him. She was going to have to do a lot of trotting from now on, Kirk thought. But it was obvious she didn't mind.

He let them get well ahead before he spoke. "So that's why you assigned Garrovick out of rotation. I might have known. Damn it, Sulu, you're incorrigible."

The helmsman grinned, but he spoke earnestly. "It's been going on for months, Captain. They just needed a little shove. They're so right for each other."

"But--" The captain caught himself. "All right, Mister," he barked.

Sulu wiped the grin off his face, and hurried to catch up to the rest of the party. But to Kirk, even the back of the helmsman's head looked pleased. "Incorrigible," he repeated silently.

The party halted outside the cave, shielded by an amalgam of rock and vegetation.

"Any questions?" Kirk whispered. "All right. Go!"

They made it inside without encountering a guard. Maybe luck was running with them today. Spock had already found the shaft to the farm, and Sulu left an indicator in case a search party had to find them. Within minutes, they were back at the farm. By the time the guard insect returned to the humans, they were hard at work. Kirk held his breath as it walked past the Enterprise group, but it took no notice of them at all.



"So far so good," he whispered. "You have your orders." He waited until the guard left them again. "Implement."

Politely, Garrovick handed the leaf-mold he was carrying to Spock. Then he was gone -- edging unobtrusively through the other workers to the shaft at bearing 110. Kirk timed five minutes carefully. Now it was his turn. He made his way through the colonists, turning away from their contented expressions and tranquil eyes. Bearing 290 -- he and Spock had both spotted it yesterday. Yes, here it was. He moved swiftly through the shaft, straining to hear, although he knew an attack would be silent. A large shaft bent away from the one on his bearing. Kirk hesitated, then stayed with the

original direction. But as he traveled, the light began to fail. Soon it was dark ahead. This was foolish, he decided, and retreated.

The larger shaft took him away from his assigned area. But it was obviously a main route. Kirk hugged the wall, darting from outcropping to outcropping. If a guard caught him between shelters, he thought grimly, that would end his participation in this mission. But again, luck was with him. He was hidden when he saw the shadow of a large mandible cast on the tunnel wall. He pressed back, phaser ready. But the large insect went by him, unaware of his presence. And it was carrying a load of some sort of grain!

Kirk waited a moment. Then he holstered his phaser and followed the insect. It led him past several by-ways, but Kirk followed it as it paced steadily through the tunnel.

"Captain!"

Kirk stopped short.

"Captain! Up here!" Kirk looked up, and located Garrovick perched on a ledge. Swiftly he climbed up to join him.

"Report."

"This whole section is storage, Captain. Grains, and row on row of vats with some kind of liquid."

Kirk felt years younger. "So the farm is not the only source of food for the ants?"

"No, sir. It can't provide even a small fraction of it all."

Kirk sighed. "Okay, let's get back." He slid down to ground level.

"Look out, sir!" Garrovick's yell echoed through the shaft. Kirk whirled. One of the insects was bearing down on him, so close he didn't even have time to try for his phaser. There was only one chance. Kirk smiled vacuously, and held up his arms.

The insect stopped, antennae extended. Kirk forced himself to remain motionless, arms outstretched. The insect picked him up; instinctively, he went rigid. He simply could not control his revulsion. The insect put him down, holding him flat. Kirk braced himself for the sting.

"No!" A yell came from above him, and a red-shirted figure leapt at the insect. Startled, it fell back. Kirk shouted a warning, but Garrovick charged straight toward it. The insect grabbed him, and flipped him back. Kirk heard the lieutenant grunt as he hit the shaft wall. Kirk was in motion, reaching for his phaser, but the insect was a microsecond faster. One leg came up, knocking Kirk off balance. Then it had him. Kirk felt the squeeze, and then the sharp sting, and then no more.

As before, awareness returned first, followed only slowly by sensation. Kirk was held fast. He remembered the strength of the web, and his heart sank. Then he heard a muffled groan. "Garrovick!" he whispered. "Garrovick! Are you all right?"

"Yes, sir." The whisper was strained. Kirk fought and pulled, until he made it to his knees. The young officer lay flat on the web, his face gray.

"What is it?"

"My shoulder, sir. I landed on it. I think -- mm!"

"Great!" Kirk looked around. They were alone. "Work time," he muttered. Painfully, he made his way over to Garrovick. "This may hurt," he warned. Garrovick got his jaw set just in time as the captain pulled his torso free of the web. Even the gentle exploration was painful, and Garrovick closed his eyes.

"Well, nothing's broken." The probing stopped. Garrovick relaxed, still breathing rather quickly. "However--" the captain grabbed the injured shoulder and forced the arm up. Garrovick's body convulsed, and his scream echoed in the chamber. Kirk held him as he sobbed for breath, fighting to regain control.

It was like pulling out of a deep dive, but finally Garrovick oriented himself. He realized his head was resting on the captain's shoulder. Startled, he pulled away.

"Take it easy," Kirk said gently. "Better?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sorry, Mister. But that's a little easier if you don't know what's coming. Your shoulder was--"

"Dislocated," Garrovick supplied. "I should have thought of it."

"Damn painful," Kirk sympathized. "Especially after a period of time. But McCoy'll give you something for the inflammation. Couple of days in Sickbay, you'll be good as new."

"Yes, sir."

"Lie down. We might as well be comfortable."

"Hadn't we better try to escape, Captain?"

"Negative. You're in no condition to run, even if we could get free. A search party will find us. Now, lie down." Kirk took Garrovick's sound shoulder and guided him back to his lap. Garrovick stiffened, embarrassed, but at Kirk's order he made himself relax and close his eyes. Soon he was sound asleep. Kirk resigned himself. Garrovick was in no condition to be left. Looked like the others were going to get the fun on this trip. Damn.

People were moving around the chamber. Garrovick woke up, looking slightly dizzy. He tried to sit up. "I'm sorry, Captain," he began.

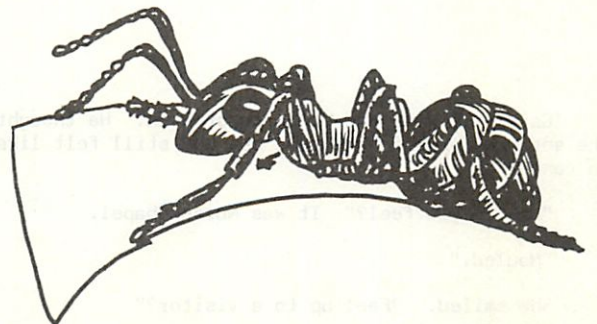
"Hush," Kirk whispered sharply, pushing him back. Then he smiled down at the sheepish young officer. "You got some badly needed rest," he added kindly. "Lie low. I don't want to attract any--"

The captain stopped, and Garrovick felt him stiffen. Garrovick turned his head, and got a severe shock. Mr. Spock stood at the edge of the incline, a sweet smile on his face.

"Spock?" The captain spoke tentatively. Spock sat down by the edge of the web, apeing the contented stance of the colonists. One of the insects was coming toward them. Spock reached for the food and settled down again, smiling vacuously. The insect flicked survival cubes to Kirk. Spock turned, and for a second, gave the two humans a meaningful look. Kirk nodded, and lifted a cube to his mouth. The insect moved away.

Quickly Kirk hid the cubes. Spock waited until the guard's attention was fixed on the other groups. Then he turned and lobbed a small package to the captain. Kirk caught it neatly. Garrovick turned to look; it was a personal phaser.

When the colonists rose to regroup, Spock turned back to them. "Join the work group at 1500," he hissed. Then he was gone.



The room was very quiet. "Might as well relax, Lieutenant," Kirk said resignedly. "We have half an hour still."

"You have a chronometer, sir?"

"Mr. Spock attached a miniature to the phaser. He thinks of everything."

"We didn't bring any miniatures."

"We must have been out several hours, you know."

"He's been in touch with the Enterprise!"

"Strongly indicated." Kirk grinned. "Relax, Lieutenant. Mr. Spock is in charge, and you may be sure all contingencies have been provided for."

"Yes, sir."

Garrovick counted half an hour. And at his count, Kirk checked the chronometer. "Okay. Let's see what a phaser can do about this web." He aimed the tiny instrument carefully, and fired. The web disappeared. Kirk grunted in satisfaction. "Can you walk?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let's go." Kirk grasped Garrovick's good elbow, helping him to his feet. Then he guided him down the slope. A jolt of pain went through the young officer with every motion, but he kept on. "Good man." The captain's voice in his ear encouraged him. "Steady now. Don't fall. Good." They were on the flat ground. "Now, let's move." Kirk took the lead, moving swiftly, checking to be sure Garrovick could keep up.

Garrovick forced himself to move faster and faster, made profoundly uneasy by the total absence of the insects. We ought to be dodging them, Garrovick thought. Where are they?

They rounded a bend, entering the main farming area. Kirk halted in astonishment. The ceiling was gone. And as they watched, a group of the colonists dematerialized. "They're beaming them up!"

"Captain!" Sulu waved to them excitedly. "Move together for beam-up!"

"Where are the insects?"

"We're attacking at the cave mouth." Sulu raced over to them, communicator open.

"Attacking!"

"Purely diversionary, Captain. Smoke bombs and noise. There'll be no casualties. But Mr. Spock theorized that an attack would mobilize the entire colony..." The transporter effect was beginning, and the transporter room formed around them. Garrovick reeled, and was steadied by the two officers.

"Get this man to Sickbay!" Kirk ordered. "Where are the colonists?"

"Coming up the cargo transporters, sir," Scott reported, entering on the words. "Dr. McCoy has prepared a simulated environment for them. They'll be fed and bedded down immediately."

"Where's Mr. Spock?"

"At the decoy attack, sir."

"Beam me down there."

"Right away, sir."

Hands were reaching toward Garrovick, helping him down the transporter steps. He had just realized that the hands were Mr. Scott's when he was eased onto a stretcher and borne away.

Garrovick woke and began to stretch. He thought better of it immediately and took inventory more cautiously. The soreness was much better, but bed still felt like an excellent place to be. He stretched his legs, and grunted in contentment.

"How do you feel?" It was Nurse Chapel.

"Mauled."

She smiled. "Feel up to a visitor?"

"Who?" Then suddenly he knew. "Hey, I -- ouch! Is my hair straight?"

"You look fine."

Garrovick's breathing was out of order, and his heart was beating too fast. Then it leapt. "Mari!"

"Hello, Danny." Mari hesitated, shyly. Then she walked over, and deliberately kissed his forehead.

"Hey. That's taking unfair advantage of a guy."

"How do you feel?"

"Okay." They smiled at each other. Then Garrovick gave himself a slight shake. "Hey. Tell me what's happened."

"We're still in orbit. Xenobiology is monitoring the insects. They've settled down, and seem to be back to normal. The farm is almost repaired. We're waiting to see if they will enslave the baboons, but there'll be no shortage of food even if they don't."

"What about the colonists?"

The vivid little face clouded. "They're still on tranquilizers. We'll take them to Minerva as soon as we leave here; they're preparing for them."

"Why are they still drugged?"

"Dr. McCoy says it'll be best if they only have one major transition."

"Whoo. Wonder what will happen to them?"

"I wonder."

They sat in silence for a moment. Then Garrovick stretched out his good arm. Owa took his hand, and gripped it tightly. "I guess we have more immediate worries," she said, a little tremulously.

"Guess so," he agreed, and squeezed back. "Still, other people manage. Now listen, Mari..."

In the hallway outside, Kirk halted. He listened for a minute, then turned away. Garrovick could get an official visit later, he decided. Right now that young man had other things to occupy him. Disgraceful of course, but what could a mere captain do? He was still smiling as he stepped into the turbolift, and ordered it to the Bridge.

"Here you are, sweetie." McCoy knelt to take the little girl on one knee, fumbling in his pocket. The rock candy almost distracted her from the hypo -- but not entirely. "I know, sweetheart," he said gently as the blue eyes filled with tears. "It wasn't much, but it was all you had. There. All done. That wasn't so bad, was it? Nurse, make a note on this -- on Janie here. We'd better add a half cc to her dosage. She's too far out of it."

"Yes, Doctor." McCoy waited patiently while Chapel found "Janie" -- FID K623-2X147. There was in fact no "Janie". But no patient of McCoy's -- or Chapel's, for that matter -- was going to be known by her Federation number.

Across the room, another child began to cry. "Doctor!" Collins called.

McCoy hurried over, candy at the ready. "Here you are, Marmeduke, honey," he drawled.

"It's Sammy!" Collins snapped.

"Sorry."

Collins snorted, to cover the slight awkwardness. "Rock candy," he joshed. "Really, Doctor."

"Best soothing compound known to medical science," McCoy returned austerely. "And what was good enough for my great-grandpappy, Dr. Beauregard Jefferson Davis Lee McCoy, is good enough for a young--"

"Dr. McCoy," the intercom sounded. "Bridge to Dr. McCoy."

McCoy bounded over. "McCoy here."

"Bones, we'll be leaving orbit. Think the engines will alarm the colonists?"

"Should be okay, Jim. They've just gotten their QTD. But Jim--"

Kirk sighed. "I know, Bones. Bridge out."

Damn! McCoy looked around at his staff. They sat among their charges, frozen with disappointment. Then one by one, they turned back to their tasks. But McCoy rebelled. "Take over!" he snapped, and stormed into the turbolift. "Bridge." He concentrated on working up a fine head of steam as he marshalled his arguments. Intelligent life form... possibly advanced civilization.... The doors opened. "Jim!"

The captain looked unhappy, but he replied calmly. "We have orders, Bones."

"But Jim, the shielded probes didn't tell us a thing about those insects. I've seen the data. We don't know any more about them than we did three days ago!"

The captain shrugged like a man fresh out of arguments. McCoy searched for an ally. "Spock?"

It wasn't going to work. Spock sat at his console, all attention fixed on the preparations to leave orbit, disappointment showing only, perhaps, in the fact that he did not turn. "I see no better course, Doctor."

"It's such a different type of mind, Dr. McCoy," Uhura offered.

"But--"

"A beacon satellite is in orbit, Doctor. The insects will be safe from further interference. And Starfleet will place the planet on Exobiology's schedule."

"At a low priority, since it's not colonizable." McCoy couldn't swallow his disappointment. "They'll get here in a decade. Maybe. Spock, isn't there some way you could rig the universal translator to communicate with those insects?"

"It might be possible, Doctor, if there were some way of making contact on those terms without further violating the Prime Directive."

McCoy grunted in discouragement.

"I know how you feel, Doctor." McCoy's eyebrows lifted in surprise, but Spock persevered. "However, curiosity is not sufficient justification for possibly harming an alien culture."

McCoy could not deny it. "Damn," he said softly.

"All right, Mr. Sulu," Kirk ordered. "Prepare to leave orbit. Warp two."

"Warp two, sir," Sulu acknowledged.

McCoy walked over to stand by the captain's chair and they all watched the screen as the planet shrank, and disappeared. McCoy sighed. "I suppose there are just some aliens we'll never be able to communicate with."

"Unfortunately," Spock agreed tonelessly.

Kirk looked from his disappointed first officer to his disappointed chief medical officer with a wry smile. This was the other side of exploring the unknown, he thought: the frustration, the unknowable. On board, a lost generation. On the planet, conceivably, an injured culture. Damn, indeed.

But somehow a voice was speaking from his memory, reminding him of what made even these moments worthwhile. "We have supplies, seeds, tools, and housing," it said. "We have each other...."

.....



The steeliest, kindest eyes in the 'Fleet,
watching,
piercing
with laser-insight and fierce illogic
any mind:
alien, human,
friend as truly as foe.

No pretense,
no facade survives his ice-blue gaze.

No arrogance,
no cruelty endures his life-loving wrath.

Once felt,
that wrath heals as it burns.

Once known,
he is the deepest, the truest friend: "Bones"

Ronni Sacksteder

SECOND TIME AROUND

samantha worchester

Hi! Remember me? It's now exactly one year later and you would have thought I'd have learned my lesson about Disclaves. You might even have convinced yourself that I'd never attend a Disclave again. Wrong on both counts. In spite of the fact that I really couldn't afford it -- Jo was going and she convinced me that...well, what the heck, what's the money for anyway -- I went for a second time and suffered my second disaster. (Ed. Note: See *AMBROV ZEOR* #3).

Fool that I am, I refused to entertain the thought that lightning would strike in the same place twice and thereby hangs this tale -- or more accurately, my foot.

I even had my three warnings again -- this time well in advance. The first was the simple fact that I really didn't have the money for this trip ...Jo "took care of" that problem. She had a friend who lived in Washington and who would be more than willing to put up with houseguests. (She'd also provide shuttle service to and from the hotel.) "It'll only cost you the train fare and food," Jo had said convincingly. I can distinctly remember giving her an "are you out of your mind?" look. You see, I devour fanzines; and Jo knows that without my daily ration I go into *entran* (oops, wrong fanzine, but you get the idea) so she knew that if there was anything new or decent out I would buy. She also knows my other weakness -- art auctions -- and is aware of the fact that I will buy almost anything with a certain fan artist's signature on it -- no matter what the cost and in spite of the fact that I long ago ran out of wall space. In the end, I sent in the check for advance registration -- I even conned Maggie into going with us.

Then I hit -- more like got hit with -- warning number two. One week

to the day before we were scheduled to leave for the con my bed bit me. Maybe I'd better explain. You see, I have a small studio apartment complete with a Murphy double bed. (Originally, I had two Murphy singles, but I saw these beautiful, full-size sheets in Bloomie's which I couldn't resist so -- fool that I am -- I bought them. It took seven months of badgering my building before they replaced my singles with a double. What a mistake! That double bed neatly, well, not so neatly, severed the door of the bar that is built into my teak bookcases... But that's another story. Back to the night in question.) It was late and as I was pulling that blinkity-blink bed down from the closet where it usually hangs out so that I could retire for the evening, it decided to retire me -- possibly because Murphy wasn't around to help. It took a nice chunk out of my right leg. (Look, I didn't realize it was hungry. I would have fed it, honest!)

Well, two doctors and a specialist later... (I would have settled for one doctor -- my mother wouldn't.) "What do you mean my leg's broken? I'm going to Disclave next weekend and I've been asked to run the STW table." "If you go, young lady, it will not be under your own power." "Aw, c'mon Doc, I'll bring you back a light sabre." We compromised; I went on crutches and no STW table. (You should have heard Con Arrangements East scream -- matter of fact, Shirley probably did!) Well, that gave me all of a week to practice with the crutches... (Ever try taking over two seats on a New York City bus in rush hour?)

Once I had my doctor's reluctant permission, the next step was Amtrak. It was a sure bet I couldn't go coach. Cast and crutches presented logistical problems which necessitated a change in reservations. You would have thought I would have been smart and simply given up the trip at this point, wouldn't you? What with all the extra doctors' bills *et al*... No, that would have been logical. The ticket agent I spoke to was very helpful -- his suggestion was Amtrak's Club Car. (For those of you who don't know, that's first class -- and I do mean first class, complete with swivel chairs.) I was feeling very smug and pleased with myself until he hit me -- I get hit a lot in this story -- with exactly what this club car trip was going to cost -- about double the coach reservation I'd already made. I gulped and switched the reservation. (What choice did I have? After begging, swearing at, and pleading with my doctor to allow me to go, I'd be damned if I'd stay at home -- especially when there are such things as credit cards.) Then I calmly informed the agent that I wouldn't be able to navigate any stairs. It was his turn to gulp. "We'll have a wheelchair waiting," he assured me.

I hung up the phone and debated exactly how to tell Jo and Maggie that the cheapy-cheapy weekend we had planned was already a pipedream if we wanted to travel down to Washington together. Here I must say that both girls were dolls. Neither felt I should travel alone so both switched their reservations. (I won't bore you with the week's worth of swearing that went on after my telephone calls.)

I did say three warnings. The night before we were scheduled to leave for the convention New York City was hit with a severe blackout. (I wonder if someone up there was trying to tell me something? Ever feel responsible for "an act of God"?) I spent the entire day -- thank God I'd packed the

night before -- on the phone with Amtrak, Maggie, Jo and the friend in Washington who was putting us up, trying to determine if we'd even get a train out of the city. (Conference calls do nothing for a budget -- I dread the thought of my telephone bill.) I should point out that Maggie lives in Staten Island and needs at least an hour to get over to Penn Station. Our train was scheduled to leave at 6:30 p.m. and it did -- but from Newark. You guessed it folks, there was no way I was getting to Newark so we went down the following morning. (Sigh! I guess I'm just not destined to see an entire Disclave.)

I took a taxi to Penn Station. Maggie and Jo were already there waiting for me. While the driver unloaded my luggage, I sent Jo in search of a porter with the wheelchair. (Poor Jo, she never does get an easy job...) Once the porter showed, we were treated to a tour of the bowels of Penn Station -- ramp and elevator style. As we got on the elevator, the redcap misjudged the distance between the end of my foot -- sticking straight out -- and the elevator wall. Smash! Very painful! Jo coined the watchword of the weekend as a result of that accident though. "Watch the Foot!" became my trademark. I later even had a T-shirt made up with those three words blazoned across the front -- sort of a warning sign. And Jo, somewhere in the bottom of her drawers, has one that reads "Sam's Pusher". She wound up as the force behind my wheelchair for that entire weekend -- little did she know what she was getting into at this point in time. (May I point out that I weigh one hundred and something pounds; Jo weighs about two-thirds of that. See what I mean when I say that Jo never gets the easy job...?)

They met us in Washington with another wheelchair and saw me and my crutches safely to a cab. Believe it or not, we made it to the hotel and got registered at the Con with a minimum of difficulty. (After all, who is going to keep a person on crutches waiting on a registration line?) But, after two hours of seeing the con, my arms -- not to mention my other leg -- gave out. Unfortunately, the only wheelchair the hotel owned was in use. (I knew the person in it so I knew she needed it more than I did -- *c'est la vie!*) Here let me plug the hotel -- or at least it's manager -- who was kind enough to send clear across town to another hotel for another wheelchair. (And I wasn't even staying at the hotel at this point.) Oh yes, remember that friend we were staying with? The picture changed drastically when I realized that I'd have to get in and out of a two door car all weekend. And, when she told me that my room was at the head of a long, steep flight of stairs, I decided to take a room at the hotel. Jo, I think because she had promised my mother that she wouldn't let me out of her sight all weekend, opted to stay and split the cost with me. (Ever try to get a hotel room without reservations in a hotel while it is holding a Con? Guess our feet [*sic*] rates as a minor miracle.)

And so, that cheapy-cheapy weekend turned out to be very, very expensive -- again. But don't let anyone tell you that broken legs don't have their compensations -- wheelchair races down hotel corridors (GANGw-a-y), a front row seat at the costume call, and yes, I even believe that people felt sorry enough for me to let me "have" the art I bid on. So I guess all I can say is, "until next year..." One thing though, last year we went by car; this year Amtrak. Both were disasters. Next year we'll have to

give the bus or a plane a whirl. P.S. Can you get to Washington by boat?

DISCLAVE



Time used to be my friend.
I was young then, and it seemed
That I would have an eternity
To follow the stars, to find
The wonders and miracles
Which were driving my dreams.
I had my beautiful lady,
The silver-clad nautilus, mine to command.
I could have steered her to the edge of heaven,
And she would have gone willingly
Under my hands.
And I had my crew, and my two dear friends.
The first, the lifeblood of my vessel;
They helped me guide her through her journeys.
The second, the lifeblood of my very soul;
They followed me to my heaven
And would have joined me in hell
Had I asked them to come.
But time has a way of disappearing
And becoming wisps of memory.
And when the time for dreams
Is all in the past
With none left for the future,
Time is no longer a friend,
But a deadly foe
To be grappled with in my descent.
For my two dear friends
Are no longer here
And my silver lady
Belongs to someone else.

OBSOLESCENCE

Ellen L. Kobrin

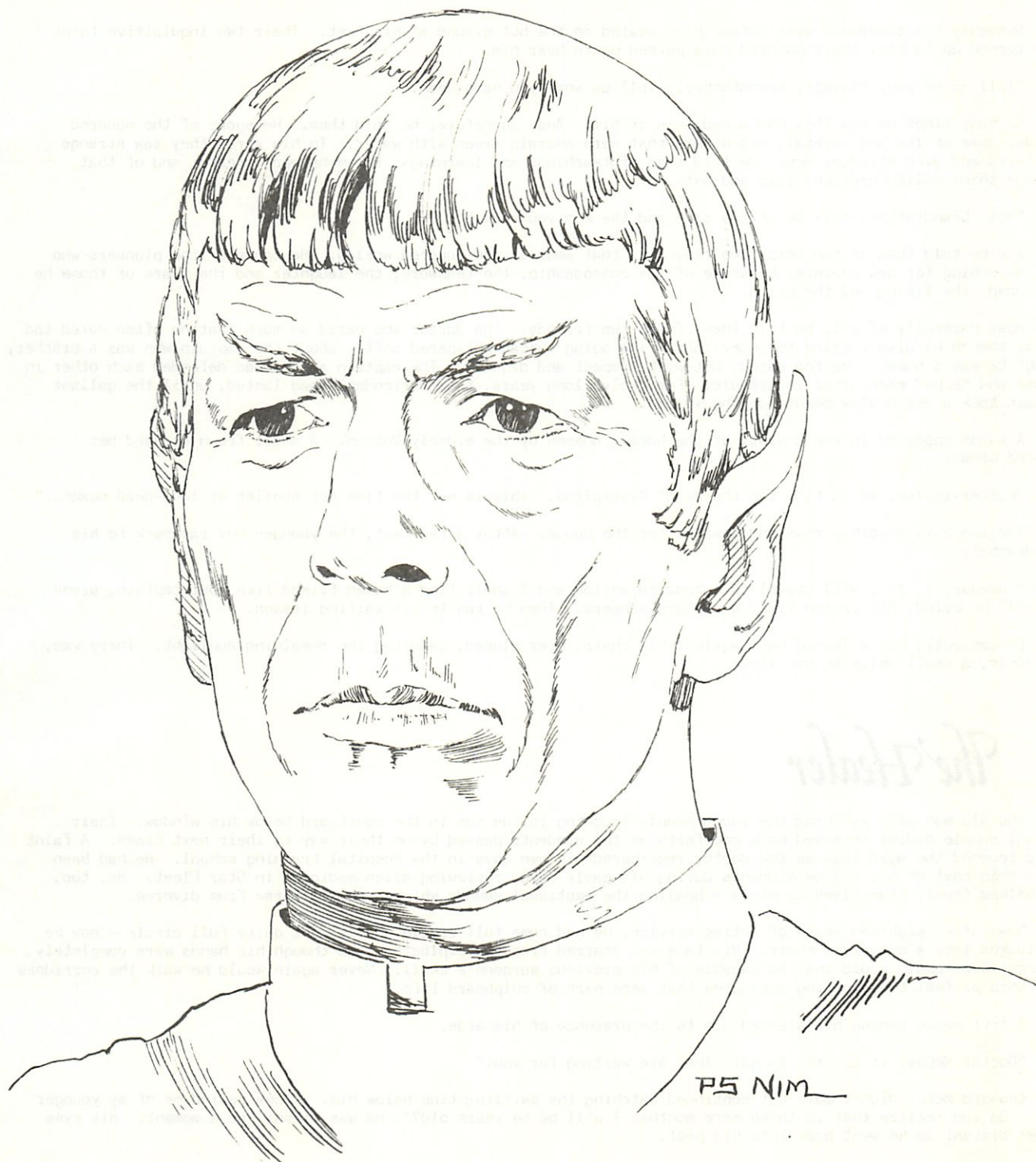


Memories

...cut-crystal beads encapsulating loved ones... and times. Memories link us not only past to present to future... but carry us on crystal-linked bridges... to infinity.

Jacqueline Bielowicz

Spock



P5 NIM

Spock

The old Vulcan sat in the blazing sun. It felt comforting to his old bones and seemed to ease his old wounds. His tired eyes, encased in a wrinkled face burned yellow by alien suns, roved over the surrounding landscape. He could smell the bittersweet odor of the *pon-raff* blossoms. It was good to be on Vulcan during the spring. Around the corner of the house, he could hear his grandsons' voices in the Song of Exercise. The faint chant helped his mind slip into reverie, forgetting the illogic of day-dreaming.

Suddenly his grandsons were before him, seated on the hot ground at his feet. Their two inquisitive faces were turned up to him, their pointed ears perked up to hear him.

"Tell us of your travels, Grandfather. Tell us what you have seen."

So many times before they had asked this of him. And, as before, he told them. He spoke of the hundred worlds, some of ice and crystal, and others that were emerald green with water. In his words they saw strange creatures and even stranger men. He told them of teachings and learnings, triumphs and defeats, and of that strange thing called emotion, love and hate.

"But, Grandfather, tell us of the ship and the men you knew."

And he told them of the ship, the tiny city that went to the hundred worlds. He spoke of the pioneers who went searching for new secrets; he spoke of the comradeship, the teamwork, the laughter and the tears of those he had known, the living and the dying.

Most carefully of all, he told them of his two friends: the doctor who cared so much that he often cared too close, though he always tried to understand. The aging Vulcan whispered softly about the captain who was a brother, though he was a human. He too cared, but with respect and dignity. The captain and he had defended each other in danger and helped each other in trouble. For twelve long years, their friendship had lasted, until the gallant captain took a death blow meant for the Vulcan.

A woman appeared in the doorway of the house, unseen by the elderly Vulcan. A small frown creased her slanted brows.

"Father-in-law, it is time for the boys' Discipline. This is not the time for stories of long-dead humans."

The two boys smoothly rose and started for the house. After a few feet, the younger boy ran back to his grandfather.

"Someday, I, too, will travel to a hundred worlds and I shall find a human friend like your captain, Grandfather!" he cried, his vision fixed on future wonders. Then he ran to his waiting lesson.

Contentedly, Spock leaned back against his chair, eyes closed, savoring the remaining sunlight. There was, curiously, a small smile on his lips.

The Healer

The old man sat, watching the young people laughing in the sun in the courtyard below his window. Their strong, supple bodies streamed back and forth as the students passed by on their way to their next class. A faint smile touched the aged lips as the doctor remembered his own days in the hospital training school. He had been older than most of his fellow students during his early days, reviewing alien medicine in Star Fleet. He, too, had walked freely from class to class - healing the emotional wounds which were still raw from divorce.

Now, after eighteen years of active service, he had come full circle. Well, not quite full circle - now he was locked into a motorized chair. His face was scarred from the explosion, and though his hands were completely healed, never again would they be capable of his previous surgeon's skill. Never again would he walk the corridors of a ship or feel the exciting pressures that were part of shipboard life.

A soft noise behind him alerted him to the presence of his aide.

"Doctor McCoy, it is time to go. They are waiting for you."

Leonard McCoy didn't move but continued watching the swirling tide below him. "They remind me of my younger days. Do you realize that in three more months, I will be 64 years old?" He was silent for a moment. His eyes became distant as he went back into his past.

"She was an excellent ship," he murmured. "The worlds we touched; the things we saw! We would go for weeks with little to do and then something would come up that had to be solved within hours."

His head and shoulders slumped forward as he stared at the ridges on his hands, not really seeing them. "And the friends I had. Jim Kirk, the finest captain in Star Fleet." His voice gained a harsh edge. "When he really needed me, not all my knowledge or skill could help. And, oh God, I had to stand by and watch him die!"

The aide stood silent, sensing the older man's pain and sorrow. After a moment, McCoy continued, his voice getting stronger. "But I still have Spock, even if he is on Vulcan, raising a family. I really should go see him, but I suppose I never will. Somehow, these last years have just slipped away from us."

Again the doctor was silent. The aide checked the chronometer. "Doctor, we are short of time."

McCoy wheeled around and faced the younger man. He slapped the chair angrily. "If it wasn't for this damn thing, I could still be out there, patching up those poor bastard security men, getting first crack at the new diseases. Instead, I'm stuck in this infernal machine." He glared up at the aide, defiantly. "Did you know that I once cured a rock? And I always intended to find a cure for a rainy day."

The younger man laughed softly. Everyone knew the history of Leonard McCoy: he would have made Star Fleet's Surgeon General. The only thing that had stopped him was his insistence on entering a mine that had already suffered three explosions to treat the injured miners instead of waiting for the patients to be brought to him. The fourth explosion had finished his active career as a practicing physician.

"You can still find that cure for a rainy day, Doctor, but right now there's a class waiting for you. It wouldn't do for the administrator *and* the best instructor in this hospital to keep his students waiting."

McCoy glared at him, then joined him in his amusement. "You're right, David. Re-work my schedule so that some time soon I can work on rainy day research."

Both men were laughing as they headed out of the room.

The Scotsman

The small smoke-filled room was crowded with twisted machinery and debris. Tiny tongues of green flame licked over blackened control panels, adding burnt insulation smells to the odor of ozone. Barely discernable in the muted red emergency lights, a man lay buried in rubble. He had been motionless for several hours though he remained conscious. He stirred slightly as a voice came over an intercom that had miraculously escaped damage.

"Mr. Scott, can you hear me? Tal'myr has jury-rigged the intercom system so you won't have to work any controls. It won't be long now; we have rescue teams working 'round the clock to get you out... Mr. Scott, can you hear me?" The voice on the other end sounded very young and worried.

"Aye, Captain, I hear you. Dinna fash yourself, lad. I'm not going anywhere."

"Mr. Scott, we are working as fast as we can, but the rising radiation levels are hampering us. Can you give us a more precise description of the damage?"

Scotty started to chuckle, then gasped at the pain from his broken ribs. He wiped the ever-trickling blood from his forehead, sweeping the devastated room with a wry look. "Lad, the only thing that isn't damaged is the intercom, and I don't know why. It is a powerful wound me bairns have taken."

Suddenly tired, his mind drifted away from the words pouring out of the speaker; they were mostly to keep up his spirits. But Scotty had always been a realist. He knew how badly injured he was. What he wished for most was the knowledge that the crew working on his rescue were a bit more experienced. They were fine lads, but so young!

What he needed was Kirk and Spock. Both of them had known all the shortcuts. But then, this wouldn't have happened on the Enterprise. When he had had to retire from Star Fleet because of his age, he should have known better than to sign on as an engineer in the Rim merchant line. Their ships were infamous galaxy-wide for their age and generally bad condition. Still, he could say with pride that he personally had brought this ship up to the very best that was possible. But now the engines, his bairns, had turned on him, murdered him.

To avoid the steadily increasing pain, he willed himself back to the Enterprise. Aye, what a bonny ship she had been. Clean, pure as a virgin even when she was experienced. She had been his pride, his very wife. He had always given her his best, but eventually she had gone to another.

An arc of energy lashed across his body from yet another shorted panel. He groaned, weeping at the pain which slowly eased as he drifted even further back in his memories.

He had always loved engines. As a small boy in Aberdeen, his favorite times had been when his father took him to the weather control station where the elder Scott had been chief engineer. Young Scotty learned early to love the power and potential of engines. It was at a tender age that Scotty discovered his gift of tinkering could fill his life. Now his engines were sapping the life out of him as they never had before.

"Mr. Scott... Mr. Scott...!" The young captain's voice was frantic.

"Aye, lad." Scotty could barely hear himself.

"Mr. Scott, we will be through this bulkhead in two hours. Don't give up now, mister. That's an order! I need you in my engine room and I won't take... any excuse."

The younger man's voice was cracking, but he refused to give into his fear. Scotty had to smile, faintly. That was probably how Jim Kirk had sounded with his first real crisis. For a brief moment, Scotty could see Kirk, standing amid the smoke, nodding at him with a gentle smile.

"I'm afraid, sir, that is one order I won't be able to fill."

As Mr. Scott dreamt of sky blue lochs, wild purple heather, and engines the size of walnuts, his untamed Scots heart ceased to beat.

Gemini

The running man crouched beneath the overhang of a shattered wall, catching his breath, then darted into the relative safety of a man-made crater just beyond the wall. His heart thumped painfully as he realized he was not alone, but recognition of the grinning face sent adrenaline surging through his veins.

"Sulu!"

"Chekov! You old bastard! It's sure good to see your ugly face. Is the Hood part of this mess?"

The two men grabbed each other's arms, talking excitedly until a distant explosion recalled them to their situation. Both men fell to the ground, clawing to get as close to the earth as possible. Debris and dust showered down on them as a series of explosions sounded around their place of safety. After an eternity, the disruptor barrage ended.

The two ex-Enterprise crewmen relaxed, glad for the respite. First Officer Pavel Chekov of the USS Hood used the time to get tricorder readings of the enemies' positions while Sulu looked over his friend. Chekov had changed a lot since the Enterprise days. He no longer looked like a care-free boy, but had the same intense look in his eyes that Captain Kirk had had. Chekov glanced up in time to catch Sulu staring.

"What's the matter?"

"I was remembering when you first came aboard the Enterprise; you were a snot-nosed, wet-behind-the-ears kid filled with the 'glories' of space. Now look where we are." Sulu's voice was faintly sad.

"Da. Keptin Kirk would never have botched this mission like Wilson did. Imagine trying to keep Federation personnel on a non-member world going into civil war. All for the sake of some lousy mineral ores. Now Star Fleet has to rescue them without interfering in this planet's affairs."

Both men were silent for a moment, filled with equal disgust for bureaucrats who commanded starships. They talked quietly, sharing memories of other days and long-scattered friends. All around them the fighting continued, aided by Klingon ships supporting one faction. Occasionally, one of them would try to communicate with his party, but they were rewarded with only static. Finally, they could wait no longer.

"We have to find our own way back to friendly forces, Pavel," Sulu commented tersely. "You had better come with me. The last time I saw my crew, they were over that way."

"Aye, aye, Keptin," Chekov mocked lightly. "Where you lead, I follow. Even if you are only keptin of a scout ship."

Sulu struck him lightly on the shoulder. "See that you keep your head down then, Commander."

Chekov nodded his agreement. Both men drew their phasers, carefully checking the landscape before leaving their place of safety. Sulu led out, running evasively to cover while Chekov covered him. Then Sulu returned the favor as Chekov ran to join him. They had done the same thing together a hundred times, protecting each other's back. They slowly made their way through the rubble and never heard the disruptor bolt that caught Chekov in its backlash.

Sulu ran back to his friend, but Chekov was already dead, half his body a ruptured mass of bleeding flesh. Sulu ignored the renewed barrage as he knelt in the dust, clasping the body in his arms with tears running down his face. He brushed the hair away from the unmarred side of Chekov's face and kissed the cooling forehead.

"Goodbye, my brother."

Then, laying the body gently back, he dashed through the rising dust.

Love

The contract lay on her desk, breaking the clear expanse of emptiness. She had received it last thing in the day and it meant more to her than mere business. It was a contract to do all the electronics work on the new starship, Enterprise III. Her hands caressed the plastic tape as her eyes stared blindly across the office. The Enterprise III. The pain that once had ripped through her breast was now only an ache. Her eyes searched for, then found, the model mounted on a pedestal, making it the only non-functional piece of furniture in the office.

It was roughly 35 centimeters square, but perfectly scaled to the actual ship. Sulu had made it for her as a going away gift when she resigned from Star Fleet after Kirk's death. Its white hull gleamed softly in the light with its black lettering proudly displaying its registry. The Enterprise. The original Enterprise. For months after her return to Earth, she had been unable to look at it, but as time passed so did her sorrow. Then she brought it out to encourage her in times of stress.

Penda Uhura sat behind her desk, an elegant woman with gray-streaked hair, remembering the girl who had once sat at a communications panel on the Enterprise. The girl had loved her captain, but had never told him. Then the day came when it was too late. Spock brought him back from a backwater planet, dead. There was a lot of pain on the ship that day: Spock, graven-faced because his friend had died for him; McCoy, weeping because he couldn't cheat Death of his victim; the rest of the crew, who had come to depend on Kirk to work the final angle, stricken.

Sulu and Chekov had understood. They had stuck close by her during the memorial service, and when she announced that she was leaving Star Fleet, they hadn't argued with her. After she had gone, they kept in touch, refusing to let her sink into despondency. It was they who had had the idea for the electronics company, investing money in it to get it started. The company had kept her busy and fulfilled, despite the void within her.

Now Sulu and Chekov were gone too, both killed during the disaster on Beta Calpha V. Except for Spock, they were all gone. But Uhura had learned to cope with Death on his own terms. Her door slid open silently and her secretary stepped through.

"May I congratulate you on winning the Enterprise contract, Ms. Uhura? It is quite a triumph."

"Not really, Dorothy. I couldn't let anyone else except myself fit that ship with communications. After all, she has a noble tradition to fulfill. Jim Kirk's tradition to fulfill."

Dorothy looked blank. "Who was he?" She had been born 15 years after Kirk's death. Uhura smiled at her ignorance.

"Someday, Dorothy, I will have to tell you about the first Enterprise... and her best captain. Arrange for a departmental meeting first thing tomorrow and then you can go home."

Her secretary nodded and left as silently as she had come in. Uhura ran her hand over the smooth, cool plastic, then turned off the light illuminating it. She left her office and returned home to dream of a hazel-eyed man with a crooked grin.

Alpha and Omega

The bridge shined as it never had in the other world. The panels were softly lighted with myriad colored lights, and the gentle sounds of circuitry hummed in the background. The seats were empty except for the command chair. Jim Kirk sat at his usual place, hands lying lightly on the arms, his eyes on the main viewscreen. The screen showed the black velvet of space pricked with tiny lights that mirrored the colors of the consoles.

Chekov appeared at his normal station and, after a brief time period, Sulu appeared beside him. The two men silently shook hands, shrugging at the memory of the planet that had killed them both. Then they bent to their work. Kirk gazed on their bowed heads, knowing their history since he had gone and mourning the waste of their deaths. Yet he was glad that he now had back the best helm-navigation team he had ever known.

Kirk sensed, rather than saw, the arrival of Scotty and smiled when he heard the switches at the engineering console being worked. How many times he could remember Scotty exactly where he was, at his station, giving his captain that extra bit of speed. Kirk chuckled silently, remembering all the arguments that he had gotten from his chief engineer when he pushed the ship too hard, with never a complaint when Scotty had to fix the damage.

Another presence made itself felt, directly beside the command chair. Kirk glanced over his shoulder and McCoy greeted him with a wide grin. Jim wanted to ask him what he was doing on the bridge, but knew that McCoy wouldn't want to leave the action. The doctor stood with his hands clasped behind his back, bouncing contentedly on the balls of his feet. Suddenly, he leaned over, bracing one arm along the back of the chair.

"No wonder no one ever came back to tell us what it's like on this side; who would want to leave this peace?"

There was a period of waiting. The three bridge crewmen worked quietly while Kirk sat in his chair and McCoy wandered around the bridge. There were other figures on the bridge, but they were nebulous, unable to fit as closely in the plane as the five friends. Eventually, another presence entered the bridge and Kirk felt his heart beat again.

Uhura was at her station, softly setting up her communication links with the beings that shared their plane. Kirk watched her, his eyes caressing the brown satin skin he had never before dared to touch. This time, it would be different. Last time he had wasted his chances, but not this time. She smiled at him and he grieved briefly for her past pain.

Slowly, the sounds of the huge ship increased, raising the expectation of the souls aboard. Scotty checked his boards and turned to Kirk.

"Engines at full power, Captain. We're ready whenever you are."

"Thank you, Scotty. Chekov, lay in course 198 mark 6. Sulu, ahead warp four."

Chekov swung his chair around, bewilderment on his face. "But, Keptin, Mr. Spock hasn't reported aboard yet."

McCoy snorted, "You know those damn Vulcans; they live for 250 years. We'll be here for eternity if we wait for him!"

Kirk smiled, anticipating Spock and McCoy together again. "When Spock's time comes, Chekov, he will know where to find us. Ahead warp factor four."

And the Enterprise, wrapped in her cut-crystal bead, moved into the never-ending sea of stars.

birthing place

The fiery forges of heaven tremble
and spew forth gaseous tendrils
of drifting space.

Condensing

Expanding

Creating

Building

Layer on layer

Intense

Fierce

Gathering strength

They fling forth their child --

A crystal miracle

Lighting a darkened part of space --

A new born star.

Lucy Miner

THIS GALAXY OUR HOME

MAGGIE NOWAKOWSKA

Being a speculative look at the next 250 years of history in our galaxy, based upon the *Star Trek* universe created by Gene Roddenberry and expanded upon by various authors.

NOTES ON THE BASIC TIME STRUCTURE

Several *Star Trek* facts allow the historian to determine the amount of time passing between the 1960s and the command of Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise:

1. In the animated episode, "The Infinite Vulcan", the Terran, Keniclius, is said to be at least, and about, 250 years old.
2. Keniclius is said to have been a scientist at the time of the Terran Eugenics Wars, circa 1990s, which must have put his birth some time in the last half of the 20th Century. To give Keniclius enough time to travel to Phyllos in what must have been a very primitive spaceship, I have chosen 1965 as his birth year, allowing the assumption of early genius to explain his involvement in the Eugenics Wars while only in his early twenties.

Two other realities of the *Star Trek* universe impose major forms on this time-line:

1. The life of Zefram Cochrane (ZC), based on a span of 237 years: ZC was 87 when he disappeared, and had been missing for 150 years when met again by the Enterprise crew in the episode, "Metamorphosis". Since ZC is said to be a native of Alpha Centauri, within the time limits imposed by Keniclius' life span, ZC cannot be Terran-Human, for Terrans could not have reached Alpha Centauri 237 years pre-*Star Trek*, which would be in the 1970s.
2. The time of the Romulan War, which must be over in time to give Kirk 100 years of general galactic peace to allude to.

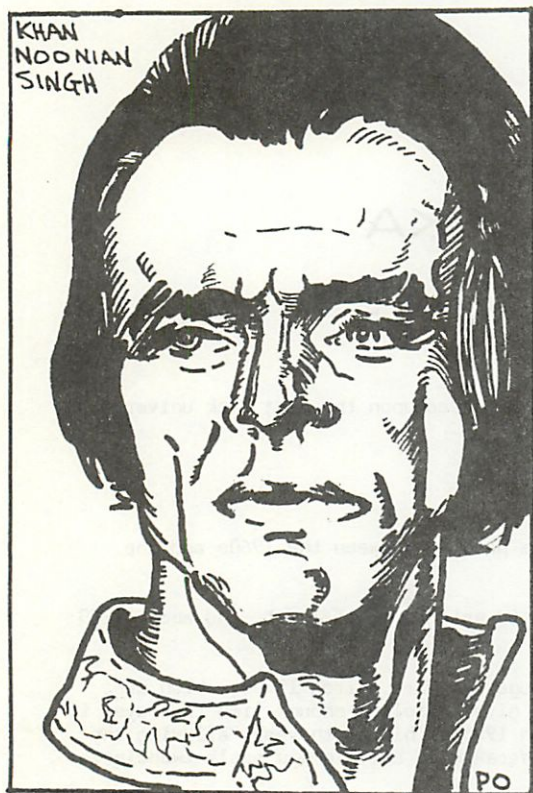
This time line is divided into:

- DECADES, with accounts of events passing within that ten-year period, sometimes by individual years, sometimes in general terms;
- CENTURIES, by Terran reckoning;
- PERIODS OF TIME, such as "The Coalition Years", "The Federation Era", etcetera.

Known facts, either from past history or *Star Trek* history, are designated by CAPITAL LETTERS.

PRE-ALIEN CONTACT

The TWENTIETH CENTURY on Terra



1940s

- 45 - TERRAN ATOMIC AGE BEGINS with detonation of first atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico, United States of America. Records and data of Nazi human genetics experiments, assumed destroyed during Allied bombings at the end of World War II or lost during the Allied occupation of post-war Germany, come into the possession of various foreign governments' secret services as well as interested private parties.
- 48 - Representatives of groups and individuals holding Nazi genetics research papers meet secretly in Buenos Aires, Argentina, South America, to discuss the use of and exchange of this information. The *Eugenics-Futurists Society* is founded at this time. With help from interested governments, facilities donated by commercial concerns, and monies from the private sector, covert human genetics research, experiments, and breeding programs begin.

1950s

- 54 - KHAN NOONIAN SINGH BORN on Terra, in Burma. Singh is one of the first "genetically superior" children born to scientists and members of the *Eugenics-Futurists Society* during the next 30 years.
- 57 - USSR LAUNCHES FIRST ORBITING SATELLITE, SPUTNIK.

1960s

- 65 - STAVOS KENICLIUS BORN on Terra, in Lithuania.
- 69 - FIRST MANNED LANDING OF TERRANS ON LUNA (Sol 3 satellite).
- 69 - FIRST ATOMIC WEAPONS ORBITING PLATFORMS LAUNCHED.

1970s

- 76 - FIRST SUCCESSFUL MECHANICAL LANDING BY TERRANS ON MARS (Sol 4).
- 77 - "ZEFRAM COCHRANE" BORN on sole planet orbiting star known to Terra as Alpha Centauri. (See 2010s entry for explanation of Terran name used in reference to this alien.)

1980s

- 88 - The *International Congress of Energy and Sciences (ICES)*, founded in 1979 to help combat the growing energy troubles on Terra, displays the vast powers it has acquired through business and political agreements by initiating and launching the first interplanetary sleep ships, known as the DY series. The world community is generally impressed and almost totally unaware of the fact that one of the ships declared "lost" that first year was in truth outfitted and manned for the biggest gamble yet taken by the ever restless human race: interstellar travel. Some of the ICES' most idealistic members crew the modified ship as it departs Terran space for the Alpha Centauri (AC) system.

The ICES, although basically a necessary and well-intentioned body, was nevertheless founded amid secret international dealings. By the late 1980s, it has become a vehicle for radical elements in the scientific and multinational industrial sectors, pre-eminent among which are the *Eugenics-Futurists*. Because of their closeness with the ICES' Control Committee and their part in the secret outfitting of the interstellar sleeper ship, the Lunar bases and Orbiting Space Stations (both American and Russian funded) are more aware of the radicals' true powers than the rest of Terra, and when their warnings of ICES malfeasance are ignored, the local governments of these first extra-terrestrial communities meet and begin undercover work to combat the ICES on Terra and in space. Preparations are begun to ensure the survival of the space bases should circumstances cut off support from Terra. Reconnaissance reveals that supply ships sent to the robot Mars station have lately contained less research material and more arms.

- 89 - A series of coups in South America brings the first of the "Eugenics Forces Representatives", advancement for the now fully mature "superhumans" bred by the *Eugenics-Futurists*, to power. The rest of Terra cautiously, or ignorantly, approves -- South America has been in such a mess for so long that anything of a unifying or visibly constructive nature is considered an improvement. The opinions of the citizens there are not heard by a world more concerned with rumors of war in Asia.

1990s

- 90 - The Peoples Republic of China falls to reported counter-revolutionary armies, this time led openly by the new "super-humans", one of whom is Khan Noonian Singh. Eugenics Forces troops are quickly dispatched throughout Southwest Asia, Korea and India (the slaughter in India shocks the world into its first clear look at Eugenics goals: racial purity on a global scale indiscriminate of nationality). Although the wide-spread killing stops suddenly (it is said, by Khan's command, an order which precipitates the power struggle that will leave him in sole rule by 1992), the world now grasps its danger and begins to muster defenses. Japan falls by the end of the year.
- 91 - The fragmented governments of Europe and Africa attempt to parlay with the Eugenics Forces, but are absorbed at last. Economic assaults on North America and Russia increase; sedition and attacks on population centers weaken the two world powers, who never completely fall but exist in states of constant warfare, losing regions rather than control of government. Even when apparent take-overs in Moscow and Washington, D.C. seem to mean the collapse of the countries, their peoples prove that the true governments and national spirits of each ultimately rest in their hands.
- Luna consolidates all national bases and declares its independence, as do Space Stations Columbia and Copernicus. Weather control is reduced to bare humanitarian levels; crucial mineral supplies and ore are cut off. Underground movements on Terra, though, are assisted by Luna with supplies and information.
- 92 - European and African dictatorships attack Space Station Copernicus, destroying it. Many of the scientists and workers there escape to Columbia and Luna. The first men land on Mars when Lunar forces arrive to confiscate arms and put robot stations there on "hold".
- 94 - Tide of war begins to turn as American and Russian undergrounds regain control of their mutual capitals; Lunar and Columbian help is evident throughout the Resurgence. *Science is Service* (SIS) is formed to help combat mass hysteria against ICES and science in general.
- 95 - Luna, ready to use the threat of arms from the Martian supplies, steps openly into the conflict. North America and the western Russian lands are wrested from dictatorial control in fall.
- 96 - Commonwealth Nations regained by spring; Eastern Europe soon after. South America, Australia, Africa won by fall. The last dictatorship of Khan (Asia, eastern Russia, the Indian subcontinent) is overthrown before the new year. KHAN AND OTHER "SUPER-HUMANS" ESCAPE TERRA IN SLEEPER DY-100 SHIP which has been adapted for interstellar travel, much as the ICES ship launched in '88 had been.
- 97 - Peace Day declared January 1, later moved to winter solstice. Eugenics Trials begin, continuing through 1999. KENICLIUS EXILED, LEAVES TERRA in experimental interstellar sleeper ship that Eugenics Forces scientists had been working on.

PRE-COALITION YEARS

The TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

2000s

This decade, and many years of the next, will be spent repairing a war-torn Earth, re-organizing governments, education and ecological systems, and searching for a more practical universal philosophy than me-against-you.

- 00 - First attempts at World Government on Terra begin, egged on by a stern Luna which says it will only trade with one government, not a whole passel of them. No consolidation, no ore or minerals; "and don't forget we control the Columbia's weather controls, not to mention all those solar power satellites". A revitalized United Nations emerges, and with the help of non-national SIS, establishes new lines of communication. Negotiations begin.

- 01 - First Terran colonial group leaves for Mars, accompanied by Lunar observers and SIS members.

Meanwhile, on the planet circling Alpha Centauri, an advance scout ship from the Kzin empire lands and falls victim to one of the hazards of its job - natural phenomena, when a local earthquake damages its engines and instrumentation. Though the natives are initially friendly to the visitors, the Kzin scouts do not return the courtesies and the entire crew is eventually destroyed. The ship is transferred to a major research facility.

Within a year of this incident, a young scientist earns his genius stripes when he OUTLINES THE WARP DRIVE THEORY by combining what has been learned of the Kzin ship drive with local scientific knowledge

ZEFRAM
COCHRANE



and adds both to his own ideas of what a crystalline structure, known to his people as "lithium", could provide in the way of energy. Unfortunately, since his planet is a solitary world, his science has only developed ship design and research into same as far as necessary to establish a base on their world's moon. And such ships are far removed from the sort that would use Warp Drive. His ideas remain just interesting theories, clever but not applicable.

- 03 - Back in the Sol system, the pain and trouble of getting life back to normal after the Eugenics Wars (sometimes referred to now as World War III) have re-inspired hatred of that conflict's antagonists and the World Government is pressured by popular opinion to rid Terra of these "criminals". Preferring not to lose the brainpower represented by these undesirables to unruly mobs or punishment-happy regional court systems, the government decides to exile convicted Eugenics Wars supporters to Mars. Friends and families are encouraged to join them. Humanitarian groups hail this non-violent punishment, although Luna objects. A measure of returning Terran strength is the ineffectiveness of that objection; besides, Mars is still too inhospitable to support any large group except one comprised of people dedicated to escaping wrathful neighbors. The move eventually benefits all, for Mars will become a scientific mecca during the early years of the Federation, and the first location of what one day will become Star Fleet Academy.
- 08 - The ICES sleeper ship launched in '88 arrives at Alpha Centauri. The local reaction to this new alien ship is cautious at first (what has been learned of the Kzin from the scout ship records and contact with its crew *was* a bit unnerving), but the Terran-type humans of this world are soon thrilled to discover that this race is "just like us".

Basically an extremely social race with strong cultural beliefs in a guest's supremacy, the natives soon learn to recognize and accept the words "Alpha Centauri" as meaning themselves, and many of the Centaurians who have daily contact with the Terrans try to ease the strangers' way through their world by allowing them to translate Centaurian names into more familiar Terran terms. One such Centaurian who is willing to do whatever is necessary to get along with the Terrans is the young scientist with the Faster-Than-Light Warp Drive Theory. Frustrated and impatient with his world's slow work on a possible deep space vehicle, "Zefram Cochrane" had fallen in love with the sleeper ship from the first moment he saw it resting silently above the silent sands of the moon.

The Terrans are also jubilant -- both over being alive and over the discovery of "human" aliens. The biologists of both races have a field day comparing notes, while the physicists soon find themselves confronted with a young man eager to start work on applying his theories to this wondrous new vessel.

- 09 - AC and Terran scientists work full-time to translate Cochrane's ideas to the sleeper ship. An attempt to apply them to communications is made, and a message of the Terrans' successful arrival and their promise to return is sent to Terra; results are unknown.

2010s

- 11 - The modifications of the sleeper ship are complete, and, theoretically, it should now be able to travel at the speed of light, or what Cochrane calls, "Warp 1". Many of the AC scientists doubt the safety of the ship, but the Terrans are anxious to attempt a return home while some of their loved ones may still be alive; they're willing to take the chance.

One of the Terrans, though, has fallen in love with a local woman and decides to stay on AC. Cochrane volunteers to take the man's place. With high hopes, and the good wishes of the AC government for their neighbors across space, the ship leaves for Terra.

- 15 - Attempts at interstellar communication via methods adapted from Cochrane's theories had continued throughout the refitting of the sleeper ship, and the last message attempted before the ship left AC arrives at the STS scanner on Mars a few weeks before the sleeper ship returns.

Luna and Mars are ecstatic over the news of a successful trip and the confirmation of alien life. Terra, suspicious over this heretofore unknown ship - an ICES ship at that - is more cautious. As for the idea of an alien encounter...

Despite AC worries about its safety, the sleeper ship arrives in one piece with a healthy crew; despite Terra's misgivings about the aliens, Zefram Cochrane proves to be an instant hit. Cochrane, in fact, displays great talent at playing the alien hero, coming to symbolize the adventure and challenge of space travel.

The still shaky World Government finds itself strengthened by the clamor for more ships, more trips, demands for diplomatic ties with these delightfully *human* aliens... and by the discomforting news that such beings as the Kzin exist. Deciding it is time to drop its obsession with the past, the government gives the interstellar travel effort its whole support.

Terran scientists and engineers, with Cochrane at their sides, begin work on further developments of Warp Drive theory and ships which could employ such energies. The modified sleeper ship becomes a fast ferry between Terra and Mars as efforts bend toward increasing Warp power. Four years is still a long time to spend in space - and that's just to AC. Practicality demands greater speed.

- 18 - A new generation of Terrans, born after the Eugenics Wars, has come of age, its eyes set on the far stellar spaces. To celebrate the declaration of the "United Nations of Terra" after eighteen years of hard labor, the World Government and the STS launch the prototype starship designed by Cochrane: the VALIANT. Its crewmembers are young, brave and soon to become legends; their mission is simply to discover what they can. Although contact with the ship is eventually lost by both Terra and AC, the Valiant does DISCOVER THE ENERGY BARRIER AROUND THE GALAXY.

The Valiant is not the only ship worked on. Cochrane and many scientists believe the secret of greater speed lies in the crystals more than the theory, and the pressure to begin a trip back to AC mounts.

20 - AUGUST: THE SPACE PROBE, *NOMAD*, IS LAUNCHED FROM TERRA.

The ship built for the return trip to AC is completed this year. During the ceremonies prior to departure for the Lunar base from which the ship will leave, an appreciative United Nations of Terra grants Zefram Cochrane honorary Terran citizenship. Cochrane, who has become quite a Terraphile during his stay on the planet, is deeply touched and declares his intention to be known solely by his adopted Terran name from that day on. Terra accepts this gesture without question and re-adjusts all records accordingly.

The SS PAX leaves Luna Port with its diplomatic and scientific entourage on Christmas Day, 2020 A.D.

Throughout the '20s, the resources of Sol system will be charted and tapped, alleviating many of Terra's resource problems. Various business enterprises join their research facilities with the SIS to tame the outer gas giants of the system, establishing the concerns which will be the foundations of future conglomerates.

- 22 - On Phyllos, Keniclius clones for the first time. The Terran scientist had traveled far in the deep sleep chamber of his experimental ship. Awakened by the Andorians on the long-range scout ship that discovered him, Keniclius became the first Terran to also meet a Klingon when the Andorian scout was captured. The Klingon ship, damaged by a meteor storm, sought refuge at an Orion base where its crew and prisoners were subsequently separated and sold. Eventually escaping his master, Keniclius, who had had his fill of galactic mischief, conceived his plan for universal order and brought it to Phyllos.
- 23 - Just after the new year turns on Terra, research teams on Ganymede discover a crystal very similar to the AC's "lithium" used in the Warp Drive. Experiments with the new substance begin immediately.
- 24 - The SS Pax arrives at AC, marking the beginning of an interstellar diplomatic exchange that one day will develop into the United Federation of Planets. Cochrane begins testing variations of "lithium" crystals.
- 25 - Scientists on Mars and AC discover the amazing properties of "dilithium" almost simultaneously. Though the supplies on AC are scarce, the moons of Jupiter seem to teem with the stuff. Each group of scientists figures out how to achieve Warp 2 fairly quickly, but, as before, it is the Terrans who have the ready industry to build a ship which can withstand such speeds.
- 27 - The SS BONAVENTURE, large, powerful and designed with more than Warp 2 in mind, leaves Luna Port for AC just as a message arrives announcing that AC engineers have figured out how to adapt some of the new energies to communication. Terra gets to work on its own such communications device.

The Bonaventure arrives at AC, its maiden voyage a total success. Although the sleeper ship and the SS Pax are technically the first ships fitted with Warp Drive, the speed of Warp 2 so overshadows Warp 1 (six months travel at 8C is a lot more practical than four years at 1C), that the Bonaventure comes to be regarded as the first "real" ship with Warp Drive. With time, this enthusiastic fudging of truth will become historical fact, and the Bonaventure's reputation will be secure.

Travel between the two planets is now only restricted by the ships available, and Terra is already working feverishly on increasing their number.

- 28 - All of space now beckons to the two neighboring systems, and efforts at communication with other worlds are increased. Though some people worry about attracting the attention of those terrible Kzin, or perhaps something even worse, activity proceeds and finally pays off with a response from the 40 Eridani region of space. Only one exchange of mathematical equations, and apparent identification terms, is made before the link is abruptly cut off. Unknown to Terra or AC, this new world, VlcN, is having immediate problems with the Kzin, and the High Council has decided to forego the pleasure of any new acquaintances at the moment. However, Terra's curiosity has been aroused, and massive efforts are directed toward reaching that area of space. And, although no more messages are sent, scientists on VlcN slowly direct more exploratory probes in the direction of the Terran signal.
- 29 - Terra and AC decide to declare a Coalition to act as a diplomatic body for the two planets and any new worlds that may join. Because of Sol system's resources, the shipyards that already ring the Pacific Ocean on Terra, and the talents of Martian SIS scientists, a Space Academy is officially established on Mars.

THE COALITION YEARS

The TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The activities of these years build on the discoveries of the previous decade. A Research and Graduate Program of the Space Academy is developed at facilities on AC, and the space flight abilities of both worlds are broadened greatly.

A large number of the "recorded but never heard from again" colonies, which will be rediscovered by future explorers, date from this period of experimentation as various groups from Terra and AC seek to further their ways of life, religion, etcetera, far away from home. Mars' scientific community is only too willing to accommodate both

business and dissident groups with ship designs - at a price, of course - and the long years of exploration begin.



The ability to travel at Warp 3 is achieved at this time, binding Terra and AC together even more tightly by their proximity. Zefram Cochrane, having first fostered the worlds' friendship through science, now promotes it with deep conviction as Coalition liaison for Research and Development in Space Exploration.

First on Cochrane's agenda is contact with the mysterious planet, Vlcn, reached through interstellar communications in '28. Second on the list is a better idea of just how far into the Terran and AC section of space the Kzin have penetrated. The cat-like creatures have grown more threatening with every year and the Coalition has no intentions of being caught off guard. In their attempts to reach Vlcn, Cochrane's scouts encounter the Rigelian Planets, a loose confederation of worlds whose peoples are decidedly more alien than the Terrans or ACs, but quite humanlike, especially when compared with the Kzin.

Although the Rigelians have been visiting each other for some time, interest in deep space has been slow to develop. As the Kzin threat becomes more acute, the Coalition extends an offer to the Rigelians to join their efforts toward defense and exploration. The Rigelians, who also find the Kzin distasteful, although they are disinclined to military efforts themselves, accept. Colonization efforts continue despite Kzin harassment; the SS Bonaventure disappears while on its third voyage to one such colony.

During this time, Luna is quietly accepted by the Terran government as a part of United Earth, while Mars declares its intention to remain a separate entity with great fanfare, and demands to be accepted into the Coalition as a free and independent planet. AC considers the claim ridiculous since all the "Martians" are really Terrans, and the Rigelians can't comprehend why anyone would question Mars' independence. The whole matter remains confused for many years when Sol 4's status is declared a local problem by the rest of the Coalition.

Out in the Eridani area of space, where Vlcn has managed to keep the Kzin out of their solar system, ousting the few that slipped in during years past, the situation is stalemated. This does much to try that planet's patience, for after nearly 35 generations of reordering their private universe along the rules of Logic, the Vlcnns are quite ready to explore a bit outside.

Indeed, the dynamics and drift of culture has demanded a new and challenging venture; many of the rules of Logic have faded into blind tradition and the various cultures which had rallied about different occupations at the beginning of the Way (the eastern desert clans into science and mechanics, the southern clans to agriculture and metallurgy, and the southeastern clans to sociology, psychology and government) have become exclusive, mentally isolated in their disciplines. Even as space has helped Terra solve some of the problems related to its racial devotion to excess, as it has relieved AC's isolation and the Rigelian Planets' arrested cultures, it now holds out new vitality to a planet whose efforts at stifling its own overly enthusiastic emotions were beginning to be overly effective.

2040s/T; 8730s/V

40/31 - Shariel, third son of Councilor Stenek, is born on Vlcn. Stenek's position on the High Council is that of historical head, based on an unbroken line of descent from the prehistoric kings. Since certain talents and traits are genetically linked to specific family lines within the Vlcn race, breeding true despite the passage of time, it is considered logical, as well as traditional, to allow those members of these families most talented in a certain direction to apply their gifts to the betterment of the race. (Religious traditions and archeological evidence also imply that the source of these genetic oddities was some distant alien race that occasionally inter-bred with the wakening Vlcnns while residing on the planet in prehistoric times.) Stenek's responsibilities as a descendent of the High King line, and the special ability of his family as proved through the ages, are in the realms of politics, intercultural relationships, disputes and arbitration, social planning and the indefinable talent of leadership. He is considered an innovator, an excellent debater, a competent scientist, and a leader in the movement toward space exploration.

Expansion of the Terran/AC/Rigelian Coalition is now stymied by the Kzin. This holding period diverts group energies, giving the Coalition time to bolster existing colonies, improve communications, and strengthen all the organizational requirements that a future Federation will need to survive. Mars and Terra compromise: Mars is granted its independence but bound to a treaty that gives Terra superior rights in many areas, such as the Space Academy administration.

Trust between the alien worlds grows through years of familiarity, while Terran domination of the Coalition continues due to AC's almost devotional support (strongly founded by Zefram Cochrane's attitudes toward Terra) and Rigelian lethargy. Terran attitudes that lean toward Terran cultural superiority are, needless to say, endorsed by this state of affairs.

44 - While running from a Kzin patrol, a Terran scout is disabled and finds refuge on a small, bleak planet far into unexplored space. While there, its crew encounters the crew of a Vlcn ship in similar circumstances. Neither craft is space-worthy on its own, but together the crews can cannibalize both to secure a run back to

Vlcn, or Vulcan, as the Terrans pronounce the name. This is the first encounter with friendly aliens for the Vulcans.

- 46 - AC ships encounter the Andorians for the first time when a damaged and lost Andorian ship asks asylum. These new aliens bring word of a distant Klingon civilization whose colonization practices sound dubious indeed, but the information is filed for future reference since the Coalition has more immediate worries over the Kzin to contend with.

A certain amount of independence of thought is creeping back into the attitudes of Coalition members now, growing from separate experiences and new planetary needs. Although the coming war with the Kzin will submerge these differences, rallying everyone, even the Vulcans, behind Terra's talents in battle, the roots of the Prime Directive policy of the future United Federation of Planets are sown now.

- 47/38 - T'Pau, sister to Shariel, only daughter of Stenek and T'Amil, is born.

The Terran spacers, who have been on Vulcan since 2044 are now preparing to return home. Although they found the Vulcan culture strange, and at times disconcerting, the hospitality and insight of T'Amil, a crack social historian and Vulcan-style cynic, has enabled them to rationalize certain disturbing elements of the Logical Way, and to gloss over the differences between Terran and Vulcan culture which might have warned more objective viewers that trouble could easily brew between the two planets.

Vulcan perception of the newcomers is also distorted, for T'Amil and Stenek are adept at persuasion and their favorite subject is "Strange Alien Cultures We Must Strive To Understand, Not Criticize". As the ancient concept of *IDIC* acquires new implications, the High Council extends a cautious greeting to the Coalition through the Terrans, while Stenek sends a frankly friendly invitation to visit again - soon. But the question is moot since an acknowledgment of the Terrans' arrival was sent as soon as the Vulcans figured out how to repair the Terran communications devices. Since then, scientists have come up with a few twists to the warp drive theories themselves, guaranteeing Coalition interest. But the High Council is trying to set a tone to the meeting, just as Stenek, with a greater perception of Terran attitudes, is assuring their good will. The future looks bright for the planets' relationship. In fact, Stenek's oldest sons are equally interested in the Coalition, and if there was one thing the Terrans picked up on, it was knowledge of where the power on the Council is today, and will be in the future.

But not everyone in Stenek's and T'Amil's household is thrilled with the aliens; Shariel, who will be seven this year, does not like them one bit. Although he is quick enough, the boy doesn't seem to have inherited the personal charm or imagination of his parents; he is already quite rigid in his thinking, sticking to the rule of Logic as if its calm certainty could save him from all misstep or blame. Perhaps, as a child, he is less blind to the true differences between the Terrans and Vulcans, and, being more susceptible to emotional temptations, has decided to cling to the ideal for protection. Furthermore, Shariel is sharply aware of the attention the Terrans have merited the past few years, measuring it carefully against his parents' attention to him. He knows there has been a shift in the focus of his training, becoming more general and less centered on the ways of government. Shariel interprets this as disinterest on his father's part, unaware that Stenek has decided Shariel would probably be better at something other than personal diplomacy and is steering him toward other fields. The boy is a natural mathematician, but in the field of politics, although the native ability is there, somewhere, somehow, the inventiveness, the ability to adapt has been lost. When the Terrans finally leave, and Stenek turns his complete attention to Shariel's Kabs-wan, the boy's opinion of the cause of his isolation seems confirmed. He hopes the Terrans never return.

- 49/40 - T'Abra, daughter of Stashu, writer, and the scientist, T'Rene, is born. T'Abra will be betrothed to Shariel when his first bondmate succumbs to the Terran Plague of 8745; their son will be Sarek, future Ambassador of Vulcan.

2050s/T; 8740s/V

- 50/41 - The message from Vulcan has been received on Terra, although interference devices of the Kzin prevent an answer. A diplomatic envoy from the Coalition is sent out immediately, and arrives on Vulcan during the cooler off-season. The High Council is surprised at the Terrans' appearance so soon after the scout ship crew's departure, but it is also intrigued by the Coalition's obvious eagerness for contact. These Terrans are also made welcome in Councilor Stenek's household.

Circumstance has also dictated that this group consists only of Terrans, although verbal messages of welcome from the Rigelian Planets and AC come with the envoy. These representatives have come on a serious mission, for the Kzin appear to be preparing for a studied assault against the expanding Coalition; would Vulcan be interested in joining their group for defense and mutual gain? The High Council debates through the rest of the year and into the next.

Vulcan's entrance into the Coalition pleases Terra immensely; the Rigelians are indifferent; the Martians, unable to decide whether to be ecstatic over the promise of this new world's obvious high science or jealous of the competition; and AC, quietly resentful - Vulcan has replaced AC as the focus of Terran affection.

The reasons for the shift in attention are not difficult to discern. Terra has finally found a society it believes to be as strong and competent as itself, a people to match Terran imagination, not merely follow in Terra's wake. The Vulcans are as dynamic and sure of themselves as the Terrans, and their history in space reflects a similar case of incurable curiosity. Both planets had liberally populated systems to explore in the beginning; both planets reacted to the Kzin threat with positive action (Vulcan's description) and aggressiveness (Terra's definition). Both people are highly mechanical, extremely pragmatic, and most important, both share liberally in that one glowing trait... leadership.

Although mutual feelings of superiority and exclusive possession of wisdom will divide the two, although Terra will come to resent the genius it once lauded, and Vulcan will deny the creativity it once found fascinating, in the

beginning, each world enjoys the other greatly. Both are nearly blind to the strong differences regarding the expression of emotion, for Terra chooses to consider the Vulcans merely reserved, and, at the height of his influence, Stenek is able to convince many Vulcans that Terran behavior is at most exotic, or, at least, quite harmless. Fortune has sent Terrans who are quiet, careful persons to Vulcan and has placed them in the home of a far-sighted genius, but the potential for misunderstanding is great.

52 - The Coalition declares a joint resolution of war with the Kzin; all research is diverted to the effort.

54/45 - The immense goodwill between Terra and Vulcan has lasted four years. Logic had convinced the High Council that the Coalition was the beginning of a viable interspace government; the very real threat of the Kzin who soon double their attacks against the Vulcan system has added extra incentive to join. Trade and scientific exchanges with Terra uphold mutual admiration, although as time passes, more Terrans show up on Vulcan, displaying cultural and behavioral traits that are more difficult to accept than those of the first visitors. Many Vulcans strive to withhold judgment. Likewise, the Terrans continue to allow their emotional and racial blindness to cloud their judgment as they consider the Vulcans "one of us", assuming that basic principles of morality are the same for all "truly humanoid" races (Kzin excepted, of course, and the Andorians are iffy; as for the few Rigelian races, who are biologically closer to the Vulcans than the Terrans or ACs, events simply haven't yet occurred to bring great moral differences between the races to light).

The illusions explode in 54/45. Some trouble in space, in the war with the Kzin, and the Terrans feel grossly betrayed; some trouble on Vulcan, preventable aggression and an unexpected disease, and these logical people feel violated. A colony is destroyed that will haunt the hearts of Terrans for years until the time will come when the tale of the "Lost Colony" turns into myth, and the accusations of Vulcan perfidy and timidity turn into little-understood insults. On Vulcan, a misplaced intention turns into a crime against T'Amil and in its wake spreads the obscenity and death of the "Terran Plague", shattering the dreams of a descendant of kings, decimating his family (and the families of many others), embittering his son's reasoning forever. Small occurrences in the history of a galaxy, but they echo and ripple across space. Not until the son of a son of a son is born will Vulcan and Terra begin to acknowledge a relationship based on more than cool pragmatism.

Neither Terra nor Vulcan is foolish enough to completely break relations, for the Kzin threat has not yet been eliminated. Terra needs, the Coalition needs Vulcan's science and strategic location; the primarily pacifistic Vulcans need Terra's willingness to get out there and fight.

The Coalition fighting forces, although composed of crews from every member planet, even Vulcan, are led by the Terrans who fill the ranks of officers almost without exception. In space, as in battle, talent takes rein, and it is clear where the gifts of aggressive leadership, cunning, and single-mindedness lie among the Coalition races. Five years pass before the Coalition forces discover the Kzin home base and present a threat serious enough to force the Kzin to sue for peace.

In the negotiations that follow the declaration of peace, the enmity between Terra and Vulcan, the growing independence of AC, and the interests of the Rigelian Planets in exploring for more trade possibilities make it obvious that the rules of the Coalition are not enough to maintain the smooth operation of an organization that embraces some strongly divergent beliefs and interests. Faced with at least one major enforcement task, experiencing some dissention and growing pains among its founding members, dreaming of expanding even further into space, the Coalition discovers it is time to reconsider and re-group. A worlds-wide conference is called where delegates put aside the outgrown conventions of simple neighborliness and set some ambitious groundwork in place for the future to build upon.

THE FEDERATION OF PLANETS ERA

The TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

2060s

60 - The charter for the Federation of Planets is formally adopted by Terra, the Consortium of Colonies under Terran auspices, Mars, Alpha Centauri, Riegels III, IV, V, and Vulcan.

65 - ZEFRAH COCHRANE DISAPPEARS IN DEEP SPACE.

67 - Colony of Wazka, on Berengaria VII, is first outpost established in space previously held by the Kzin. Wazka will also become the first Terran community established beside an alien colony of humanoids, the Newen, whose home planet was destroyed by the Kzin, eventually intermarrying and assimilating them. "Humanoid" becomes the accepted term for any human-like race among which it is possible, even if only by genetic engineering, to breed viable offspring.

69 - An Orion slaver ship ventures into Rigelian space, bringing first news of that system's peoples. Note must be made that the Orion ship never left Rigelian influence. It takes a lot to force a Rigelian to waste energy fighting, but the Orions managed. The ship was saved for research, and that part of the cargo that was intelligent was given a small, fertile satellite to settle on; observations about Orion culture are submitted to the new Federation's political and cultural experts to worry over.

2070s

This is a period of great internal growth. Economic systems between worlds diversify both horizontally and vertically, and the first rudimentary Space Fleet is assembled out of the fighting systems established during the Kzin containment.

Vulcan is not happy to find some of its strategies and emergency measures incorporated into a permanent military; reaction against its involvement in the Kzin War sets in among members of the younger generation, one far less starry-eyed toward the Federation than its elders, and a wave of ethnocentric conservatism spreads across the planet. Deeply scarred by the scandal of its youth, injured by the plague that claimed so many youngsters years ago, this generation is loudly critical of the old policies and suspicious of the slightest compromise of what it holds to be the "true Vulcan character". Stenek manages to keep Vulcan's hand in most of the major Federation developments, but since his two older sons have died, one in a Kzin confrontation, one from the Plague just after T'Amil's death from same, Shariel now must carry the family burden, and the outlook is not good for interstellar relations. The sullen boy has grown into a proud, cold man, set in his ways and one of the leaders of the new conservative movement; Shariel's devotion to Logic lacks art and wisdom, but he is respected by many who fear the emotions of the aliens almost as much as he. His sister, T'Pau, is more talented than he, and their father tries to shift family responsibilities to her, but she is adamant in her disdain for alien contact.

Although trade and the exchange of knowledge with other worlds continues, alien contacts find Vulcan cooperation difficult to arrange on many more delicate business matters and there is an enveloping sense of coolness and distance in their dealings with Vulcans, particularly the younger ones.

AC finds its scientific contributions eclipsed more and more by Vulcan developments and Mars initiative, so it turns to a quieter, and, in the end, quite powerful field - banking.

The Rigelian planets continue to expand their commercial interests, while Terra furthers its hold on the organization of the Federation and exploration through the Space Fleet, now based at the Space Academy on Mars. After a post-war burst, new developments in the application of warp power slow down.

- 73 - Andor petitions for membership in the FP. There is a great deal of discussion about this in the Federation Council, for Andorians are not exactly the most reticent or peaceful race in space. Still, even a world of avowed warriors can realize the need for change, especially when they're beginning to spend more and more time looking over their shoulders, watching out for the expanding Klingon Empire; it is much easier to understand the practicality of getting along with others when they offer protection.
- 75 - Not at all pleased with the discovery of new Klingon colonizing, the Federation prudently accepts Andor. Exploration and expansion in Andorian space by the FP begin.

2080s

- 84 - The Andor Expansion brings the young Federation into reach of an equally young empire and the ROMULAN WAR BEGINS. Representing Vulcan at the Federation Council for the declaration of war is Shariel, in place of the ailing Stenek. Knowing that the responsibilities of his Council seat will demand greater knowledge of the Federation and alien cultures, Stenek creates the position of Ambassador-At-Large for Shariel, hoping that exposure to real alien people rather than the myths will broaden the younger Vulcan's outlook.

2090s through the first decade of the next century

The Romulan War lasts for 25 years. Once again, Terra dominates the battle forces of the Federation although, at the beginning of the war, the Andorians match them, being for being. The Romulan attack on Andor in 2095, the Siege of Sorrows, effectively destroys a generation of Andorians and guarantees the planet's poor-relation status among the worlds of the Federation for over a hundred years; the Terrans fight on, but more slowly. At first, various colonies sponsor their own ships in battle, but as the casualties mount, Terrans, Martians, and colonists merge; complete Rigelian support behind the lines enables the humans to concentrate on fighting, and - though Vulcan would have preferred to stay out of the fray altogether, according to Shariel - by Stenek's authority, the shipyards, labs and strategy rooms are homes for many a Vulcan technician.

And far out in the Klingon Empire, reports of the Federation's prowess are duly noted.



THE FEDERATION OF PLANETS ERA

The TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY



2110s/T; 880Cs/V

10 - ROMULAN PEACE TREATY NEGOTIATED by spaceradio. NEUTRAL ZONE ESTABLISHED.

12/03 - SAREK, son of Shariel and T'Abra, IS BORN.

Terran domination of the now well-organized and expanding STAR FLEET continues after the RomWar. The first post-war starships, with the most powerful warp engines yet, reaching speeds of Warp 4 (5 in an emergency), start exploring ever deeper into space. As the size of the fleet increases, so does its power. During this decade, the USS ARCHON is lost, and the USS HORIZON makes first contact with the Iotians.

17/08 - Vulcan Councilor Stenek dies at the young age growing very common for Vulcans who were touched by the Plague. Perhaps, too, he was worn out by the conflicts of his family life, for both of his remaining children are staunch isolationists, and by growing tensions on Vulcan, ever more of whose natives resent the alien influences of the Federation and their challenge to Tradition.

After the RomWar, backlash against the emotional outworlders reaches the height of its strength, an influence that is to last nearly fifty years and has not faded from current galactic relationships despite the stewardship of Ambassador Sarek. At this time, many Vulcans slip completely into the belief that they not only have controlled emotions, they have eliminated them completely. Stenek had argued that their logic in accepting this attitude was based on the fear that even the slightest slip in control would plunge them back into the darkness they saw so

vividly reflected in their neighbors' actions, but that such an attitude would cause the Vulcans to transform that which had been their salvation - Logic - from useful rules to rigid dogma. Then they would be left blind to the effects of their denied emotions; Stenek had not hesitated to admit that he feared the mischief such ignorance could cause.

Shariel did not agree with his father, and now he assumes his responsibilities on the Council with the full approval of the conservatives, if not the outside diplomatic community. He persuades T'Pau to leave her historical studies to take his old role as Ambassador, a position she accepts reluctantly. Shariel is pleased, for T'Pau's daughters, both older than his son, are next in line for his and their mother's positions of duty, and Shariel would have the woman who influences them most fully aware of the nature of the "enemy".

It is also becoming apparent to both Shariel and his wife, T'Abra, that their differences on how to handle Vulcan's political and cultural problems will not be resolved, and so the new Councilor turns to his sister for advice and support. Shariel's subtle supervision of T'Pau's daughters and growing dissatisfaction with his marriage keeps him away from his private home a great deal, and, ironically, contributes to future troubles with his son who falls almost totally under his mother's liberal influence and that of her friends in the diplomatic community.

The daughter of a cross-cultural marriage that failed, T'Abra is highly sensitive to the need to compromise among people and to the harm possible through stubborn ethnocentricity. An educator, with a gift for diplomacy which she must apply covertly since her goals do not coincide with her husband's, T'Abra does her best to keep the liberal voice, however muted, alive, and to protect Sarek from the growing influence of "supervulcanitis".

Even in scientific exchange and trade, the annoying disdain toward other races that has come to mark so many of Vulcan's dealings with other Federation races attains its full power. As the older generations die early, younger Vulcans are reminded of the old troubles, and their feelings chill into icy arrogance. It becomes quite acceptable among other Federation races to express a dislike, even distrust, of Vulcans, especially among the Terrans who have lost the one powerful friend they had on Vulcan, the sole reminder of the good days before the Plague/Lost Colony. Terra feels it has been betrayed and is left to handle the leadership of the Federation without the level-headed advice Vulcan was known for. Knowledgeable beings within the FP are alarmed at this development, particularly the Andorians who are caught between Terran generosity as the humans help rebuild Andor, and Terran blindness to the various cultural attitudes they are trampling in their enthusiasm.

18/09 - T'Abra, wife of Shariel, is killed in an accident while capturing an orphan sehlat for her son. Shariel's attitude toward life does not improve. The whole diplomatic community is grieved at T'Abra's death for she had

become their go-between whenever communication with Ambassador Shariel broke down. The Andorians, in particular, are upset - for T'Abra had a strong friendship with their ambassador, who saw the Vulcan woman as a possible rallying figure for the radicals concerned with Terran dominance.

Shariel allows Sarek to keep the sehlat, named I'chaya, although he does not really approve of such pets. He also makes the one major non-Traditional decision in his life: considering his incompatibility with T'Abra despite their bonding, he announces to those parents who have begun to express interest in Sarek that he will not Bond the boy.

2120s, '30s, '40s

21 - Lin Pao, future Wazka Ambassador and co-founder of the *Prime Directive Party* (PDP), is born.

These decades mark the emergence of a more mature organization within the Federation. Membership grows to embrace over 50 planets, colonies and united systems. Star Fleet Academy becomes independent of the renamed Federation Academy of Sciences on Mars, re-locating on a terra-formed asteroid. Terra remains dominant for many previously mentioned reasons, and because the one planet with the ability, guts and clout to talk back to her is ignoring most of the Federation. The next 30 years will be the high point of Terra's career in the FP, for although her powers will remain supreme for another hundred years, now is the time when those powers are the least challenged, the most broadly applied, the most furious in their growth. The movements for Terra's partial eclipse are just beginning; not until mid-century will the first long shadow fall on the blue and white planet's free-wheeling days.

In the '30s, the Orions try to cause some trouble, but are quickly discouraged. And when they try to apply for membership in the FP, they are turned away because of their affection for slavery and other unsavory practices. Tellar is encountered during this decade; because of its rich mining potential, both on Tellar and in its solar system, it is courted most energetically by the FP.

41 - ROBERT APRIL IS BORN on Sol 4, Mars.

There is some trouble getting Tellar into the FP, and not just because of that race's argumentative ways. Tellar doesn't like the seemingly subordinate place it would occupy as a new member, and more importantly, it objects to the imposition of Terran standards on most Federation organizations and activities. Tellar wants a guarantee that the FP is not just a vehicle for Terran cultural take-over. Admission is finally accomplished in '46, but not before a lot of people have started thinking, and acting, on many of Tellar's objections. Hopes of rallying the various non-human races, once dashed by Vulcan's retreat from public life and T'Abra's death, come alive again, although now the direction is not solely anti-Terran. The Terrans are not the only people who have pulled the "Archangel Gabriel bit" on primitive planets; instances of indiscretion are also coming to light in other worlds' explorations. At a Federation Council meeting held on Wazka in honor of that colony's 80th year of existence, Lin Pao and other thoughtful representatives meet on their own and found the *Prime Directive Party*, a group dedicated to supporting the cultural integrity of all worlds. These beings are not alone in their convictions; the younger generation of FP citizens have acquired the beginning of a galactic conscience and the stellar winds are starting to blow in the direction of reorganization.

2150s

57 - AMANDA GRAYSON IS BORN on Terra.

On Rigel IV, T'Pau's husband and two daughters are killed in a shuttle accident that also seriously injures the Ambassador. She returns to Vulcan for a lengthy convalescence, announcing her intention to retire to her historical studies again. Since Shariel respects her needs for privacy upon the loss of her family, and since he is unable to convince her to set a date for her resumption of duties in the future, the Councilor calls his son, Sarek, from his duties with the Vulcan Science Academy to take T'Pau's place. This unexpected change of accession produces turns of political and social opinion on Vulcan that will alter the position of Vulcan in the FP for years to come. Stenek's enthusiasm for a strong relationship with alien worlds had remained with liberals in every culture on Vulcan, though their voices were muted by Shariel's and T'Pau's heavy isolationism. This group is joined by those Vulcans who see a need for reassessment, completely aside from the alien issue. Together, this minority grows stronger in its calls for a more serious study of possible alien contributions to Vulcan philosophy, for more cultural interaction on Vulcan itself, and for a re-evaluation of the system devised by Stenek for handling Vulcan's relationship with the FP. This last point is very controversial for, in essence, it asks for a re-evaluation of the traditional responsibilities passed on from family to family.

The "New Reformers" adopt the ancient IDIC symbol to represent their beliefs, which only heats the argument more. And if all these ideas aren't enough to horrify some Vulcans, the Reformers have a bad tendency to agree with many aliens that certain sectors of Vulcan society carry the application of Logic to such an extreme as to become nearly automatons, servants to Logic rather than its employers. Although Terrans would probably call this a choice between bad and worse, to the Vulcans it is an annoying problem, particularly when the Traditional leader of the Council is firmly settled on the "let's all worship Logic" side of the question.

T'Pau's tragedy will turn the situation upside-down. Although Shariel's long years of influence in his son's training after T'Abra's death have rooted deep traditionalist leanings in Sarek's psyche, the new Ambassador takes after his mother in planetary politics, preferring the liberal stance. In fact, Sarek helped establish the Deep Space Research Team of the Vulcan Science Academy, a group of scientists who take their theories and experiments out among the FP planets, playing trouble-shooters for the host governments along the way. In the 17 Fedyears of its existence, the Team had helped salvage a great deal of Vulcan's reputation, with most of the credit going to the young, decisive and decidedly unconventional Sarek. Shariel did not approve of the Team, but was over-ruled by the Academy Board; Sarek terminated his residence in the traditional home at Gon-Kahr and spent the years until his recall with the Team visiting Vulcan about once a year. Expecting his two older cousins to take on the work of Ambassador and Councilor, Sarek had happily buried himself in his science, relieved that he would never have to face his father in the government.

Flowing under their political differences is the strain of their lifelong personality clash, a bitter conflict that outlines more than philosophical disagreements. Sarek is very much his mother's son - in thought, in manner and, with his square frame, full face, and curly hair, most definitely in looks. He has Stenek's charm, T'Amil's wit - and his father's quick, stubborn temper. Shariel can ignore the pain that the boy's physical resemblance to T'Abra brings, and can rationalize his annoyance with Sarek's resurrection of his grandfather's style or his grandmother's "eccentricities", but he cannot wipe away the constant reminders of Sarek's temper, loathing that inescapable reflection of his own emotions, resenting this proof of weakness he can never admit to. T'Pau, alone of all the family, knows of the deep unspannable chasm that has grown between the men, and much to her surprise, finds herself growing sympathetic to Sarek's more universal position on many matters. Although her policies toward the FP do not change at once, she is beginning to question the "emotion" of Shariel's distrust of the outworlders; her years of retreat have given her time to reconsider many of her beliefs.

Due to his years with the Team, few on Vulcan are aware of Sarek's views. He is known to have a quick tongue and a persuasive manner; his leanings are liberal to observers, but the strong dedication to Tradition that flows through his personal life makes him suspect: there is too much of Shariel in him for the Reformers to trust him completely. Their fears are groundless however (at least in his public life), and by the time the next crisis in Federation politics is over, the conservatives will be the ones calling for a miniscule review in the familial successions, and the Reformers will be bowing before the ultimate wisdom of age-long abilities and responsibilities.

Sarek accepts his new role at a most touchy time in the Federation. Grievances over a half-century old are boiling over. A majority of the member planets, and most of the associates, have called for a convention to debate the issue of influence; their leaders are the founders of the *Prime Directive Party*, which has grown into a strong political movement. Central to the PDP is an idea called the "Prime Directive", which would set the procedure for dealing with new worlds once and for all: no interference, period, with the cultural or natural flow of events on any planet, member or not; all participation in FP must be strictly voluntary and distribution of the races among the structures of the FP must be made more equitable. Also on the agenda will be a review of laws and structures established when the century-old FP was only 10 planets and some colonies large.

The existence of the Klingon Empire has receded in the memories of many Federation members due to this race's long period of quiet; even the Andorians, preoccupied with rebuilding after the Romulan War, have dismissed the threat the Klingons once posed. Unknown to the Federation, the internal troubles of the Klingon Empire have been resolved, after a fashion, and its new leaders are once again looking toward Federation space.

The Convention will last nearly five Fedyears, and when it is over, many new alliances will have been forged, many old practices abandoned (read: forbidden and abandoned officially), and a new organization will come into existence. One of the major surprises of the meeting will be the re-emergence of Vulcan, or at least one Vulcan. Sarek will prove himself to be an able diplomat, a persuasive debater, and amazingly liberal to those who know him only as Shariel's son; those few who remember T'Abra are not so puzzled.

Lin Pao soon calls upon the young Ambassador, winning him over to PDP objectives with greater ease than the Wazkasii had expected. In fact, it will be Sarek who comes to provide the solid unity, the dynamics, the unstoppable sense of purpose the PDP needs to achieve its objectives without creating unwanted enmity.

Respect, even admiration, for the Vulcan grow with the years, although few non-Vulcans would say they really like him; there remains a strong barrier between his political beliefs and interpersonal relationships with aliens, in which he is firmly committed to the logic of change, and his personal life, in which he is strongly, even obsessively traditional. Lin Pao, and others who come to know him well, attribute the differences to a conflict between his intellect, which governs his independent actions, and his Vulcan emotions, which drive him to justify himself to a father who refuses to recognize such feelings and scorns him for having them. Sarek's years away from home have weighted the victory in favor of his liberal beliefs, and the confidence that will come with years of diplomatic duty will overshadow much of Shariel's influence. Still, the father's fears have not been completely washed away, and none of Sarek's friends are surprised at subsequent events in his life and family.

Terran sensibilities find themselves rudely pummeled at the Convention, and not just by Vulcan's new-found voice. Although Terra agrees that the prime directive is fine theoretically, it is leery of its application in day-to-day activities. Terra is also hurt that its allies should think such an obvious "truth" needs the wallop of law behind it. None too gently, it is pointed out that Terrans speak very highly of theories and idealism, then ignore them whenever they get in the way. Taking this as an attack on the quality of its leadership (correct), and its contributions (incorrect), Terra slings a few accusations of its own and the Convention begins to degenerate into a nasty fight.

With everyone going round and round with their accusations of interference and their closed-door assurances of support, the situation is ripe for violence. A bit of nastiness, an assassination or two and a few attempts at the same, sobers the delegates. Perhaps the sight of the Vulcan Ambassador, bloody and bedraggled, marching into the assembly hall, dragging a would-be assassin behind him, helped; certainly the power of his just barely controlled anger has its effect as Sarek makes his most famous speech, calling for an end to the insanity in words no one had ever heard a Vulcan use.

With the convention back on the right track, a combination of strong personalities, persuasive arguments/mild appendage twisting, honest desires to work things out, and a last, sudden threat of violence -- this time from the long-quiet Klingons -- comes together to remind everyone why they are there in the first place. An agreement is worked out, and although it might not be as strict as the PDP might like, nor as pacifistic as both Shariel and Sarek wanted, it nevertheless has the potential to make everyone reasonably happy -- eventually.

The UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS ERA

The TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY

2160s

60 - GARTH IS BORN on Izar.

64 - CHRISTOPHER PIKE IS BORN on Terra.

The Charter of the United Federation of Planets is signed. The Prime Directive is adopted; re-organization of many of the FP's departments, such as Star Fleet and the Diplomatic Corps, promises greater involvement by more races, loosening Terra's stranglehold (but not too quickly, for Terra won most of these rounds, citing skills and experience as factors in a gradual shift); a study into a more viable economic structure is funded; Star Fleet is granted the money and permission to start design work on a new class of starship that would act as an explorer, and enforcer, for the expanding UFP. This was hotly debated: Vulcan objected to the "enforcer" part; Terra objected that this plum was held out to the largely Terran fleet in exchange for capitulation on the Fleet adoption of the prime directive.

2170s/I; 8860s/V

70 - LEONARD MCCOY IS BORN on Terra.

72 - MONTGOMERY SCOTT IS BORN on Terra.

75 - Fleet plans for the Constitution Class starships are presented to the Federation Council. The growing threat from the revived Klingons overcomes any objections Vulcan might have, and permission to continue is given. The Fleet has promised Vulcan a ship of its own, but Shariel reaches the end of his patience with the outworlders; against Sarek's advice, he does what the conservatives have wanted him to do for years, and stops attending Federation Council meetings. However, since he doesn't resign completely, much of the effect is lost. Fellow members mark it off to pig-headedness.

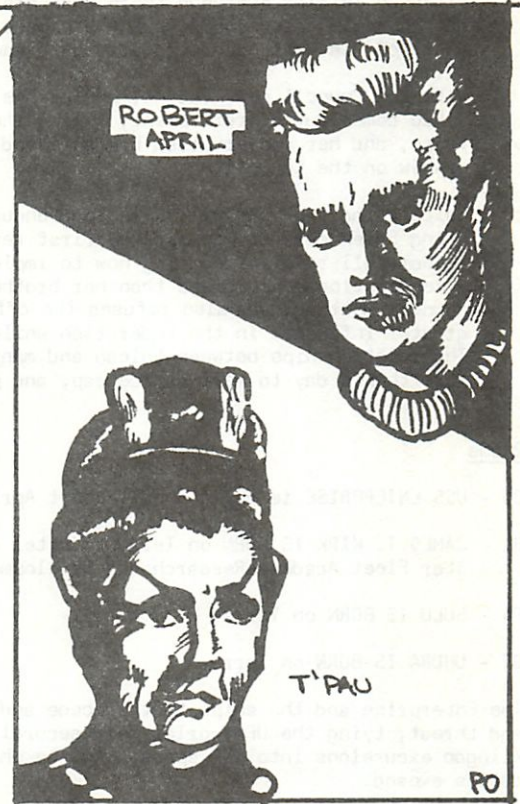
Sarek is still there. In fact, Sarek travels to Sol system personally to get acquainted with the Fleet and its new ship; he may not approve of the CONSTITUTION, as Star Fleet will call the first of the big ships, but if he is going to argue for a peace that would abolish such temptations to aggressive violence, he had better understand his opponents more thoroughly. While on a visit to the British Isles, he meets Amanda Grayson, a school-teacher working on her PhD. in Applied Sciences.

Restless, discontent with her own culture, young Amanda plans to seek her future in space once her studies are through, and at first sees the Ambassador from Vulcan as an avenue of escape: could he find her a place among the occasional non-Vulcan members of the VSA Deep Space Research team? Sarek, in turn, is impressed with her knowledge of the Team's activities and goals. They initiate a casual, business relationship which soon grows into friendship as their mutual problems with their societies, their parents, and their unique outlooks prove complementary. For the first time in her life, Amanda has discovered someone whose attitudes toward life seem to make sense, and she finds herself falling in love with the alien Ambassador.

Sarek's personal life is in an uneasy state also. Hounded by Shariel to take a mate but disdainful of his father's selections, Sarek knows he just might be forced into a marriage with one of those women, and soon, for though his lack of Bonding has delayed the call of Pon Farr somewhat, it cannot be avoided forever. As he comes to know Amanda, he finds himself drawn to the human woman whose style and thoughts so remind him of the people and ideas that were part of his life so long ago, before T'Abra died.

As Sarek considers the logic of rearranging his life along lines Shariel will find appalling, Amanda explores the idea of adapting to life on a world like Vulcan. Word on that planet's stuffiness seems contradicted by what she has come to know of Sarek; she approves of the more subtle and subdued emotions, such as the light in Sarek's face occasionally. Like most Terrans of this time, she has little concept of the undercurrents in Vulcan private life.

77/68 - AMBASSADOR SAREK AND PROFESSOR AMANDA GRAYSON MARRY. Even the liberals on Vulcan are taken aback by this piece of news. Terra is both annoyed and snidely pleased. The rest of the UFP is intrigued, and old colleagues like Lin Pao mark the marriage as one of the signs that an era is passing. Shariel's health, never very good after his recovery from the Plague, deteriorates; unkind wags are heard to say the cause is a new Terran disease called Amanda.



79/70 - SPOCK, son of Sarek and Amanda, IS BORN on Vulcan, in Shi-Kahr where Sarek has chosen to live despite the long commute to the capital, Gon-Kahr. The old father-son battles between Shariel and Sarek, which flared again at Sarek's marriage, take a dangerous turn when the child is conceived. Shariel's distaste for a half-breed grandson reflects the disapproval of many Vulcans, and he threatens to disavow the child; Sarek prevails in the end, but pays a price for his victory. Although Shariel attends the naming ceremony, the years of anger, bitterness and frustration overwhelm the sickened old man's judgment and he disturbs the peace of the rites by letting everyone there know his precise opinion of the proceedings. T'Pau concludes the ceremonies after Shariel storms off, but the damage is done; Shariel succumbs to a cardiac arrest that night, leaving the ghost of his hurts and accusations to haunt another father-son relationship.

With the Council seat vacant, and no one to assume the duties of Ambassador if Sarek fills his father's seat, T'Pau comes out of retirement, taking the position that is rightfully hers. T'Pau has grown much over the years, and her conservatism has softened by Vulcan standards; still, she would not like to have her "impulsive" nephew on the Council.

Calculating that she will live long enough to ensure some degree of maturity in her grandnephew, she begins to bring Sarek more to her side by first defending the boy against his Vulcan detractors, and second by giving the father full rein in deciding how to implement Vulcan Council decisions regarding the Federation. More aware of alien emotional processes than her brother had been, T'Pau not only declines to appear at the next Federation Council meeting, she also refuses the official offer of the seat made in her name. This move gives Sarek even greater influence in the Federation while emphasizing Vulcan's continued disapproval of many UFP practices. The relationships between Vulcan and many UFP members are still touchy, but commentators observe that it takes more than a day to melt an ice cap, and pin their hopes on the future.

2180s

80 - USS ENTERPRISE is christened, Robert April in command.

81 - JAMES T. KIRK IS BORN on Terra to Peter and Merim Kirk, research engineers connected with the Ames Complex of Star Fleet Academy Research and Development at Ames, Iowa, North America.

85 - SULU IS BORN on Terra.

87 - UHURA IS BORN on Terra.

The Enterprise and the ships that precede and follow her begin their careers as ships of cultural exchange, mercy and threat, tying the UFP worlds more securely together, aiding new colonies, and scaring off the first serious Klingon excursions into UFP space. As the ships prove reliable and their crew structure a workable gestalt, their duties expand.

2190s

90 - Daystrom computers are developed and incorporated into all starships, dramatically changing the scope of space travel.

93 - PAVEL CHEKOV IS BORN on Terra.

The Daystrom computers have made it possible for private ships to travel faster and more efficiently than ever thought possible, and though the price is still prohibitive, the beginnings of a new galactic entity, the space-free citizen (entrepreneur, soldier-of-fortune, dilettante) will be marked from this time by future sociologists. The UFP grows steadily now, with new levels of membership that allow a wide span of involvement in the organization, and a new generation of citizens is putting the old colonial attitudes behind it.

94 - James Kirk awarded special scholarship to study in Star Fleet's experimental mid-teen midshipman levels for exceptional applicants at SF Academy's extension branch on Tarsus IV.

95 - TARSUS IV MASSACRE

98 - Spock leaves the Vulcan Science Academy after completion of its first sequence and transfers to Star Fleet Academy. The strain of living with his father's demands for perfection (for Sarek was determined his son would prove Shariel wrong and thereby vindicate Sarek's choice of life), as well as the pressures of trying to build some sense of self amid many Vulcans who would deny him the same, seem to have forced the boy away from his home. T'Pau is not surprised at the decision and in an odd way approves, for the proof of the boy's true Vulcaness will be in his adherence to their traditions despite the temptations of his human heritage. She does not interfere in the resulting estrangement between father and son, despite Amanda's requests, because she remembers Shariel's and Sarek's fights too well, and prefers to let time take its course.

Word quickly spreads among the diplomats of the UFP that no mention of Spock is to be made to Sarek if a good relationship is to be maintained. The older envoys are puzzled by this turn of events, and Lin Pao makes no secret of his opinion of Sarek's attitudes. There is a confrontation between the two old friends.

Although his basic policies do not change, a definite air of dissatisfaction hovers over Sarek's relationships within the UFP for many years to come. And, despite the normal restraint of his Vulcan personality, new members of the Diplomatic Corps are warned not to risk his displeasure.

99 - CHRISTOPHER PIKE COMMISSIONED TO USS ENTERPRISE.

The UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS ERA

The TWENTY-THIRD CENTURY

2200s

02 - SPOCK COMMISSIONED TO USS ENTERPRISE

04 - KIRK COMMISSIONED TO USS FARRAGUT

Despite renewed attacks on outer colonies by the Klingons, the UFP enjoys a period of relative peace and expansion now. The presence of many more aliens in the Fleet and other UFP departments helps build trust among members, even though Terrans still dominate the rolls. The biggest problem facing the UFP is communication as the complexities of governing relations between the hundreds of individual worlds that make up the Federation grow beyond current abilities to handle. The scent of future changes can just be sensed by those who are alert; the interstellar conscience of the FP is turning into a rudimentary galactic consciousness in the young of the UFP, beings who breathe in information of a thousand cultures daily. Although many of the Federation's citizens are happily planet-bound now, some futurists predict that worldly identities will someday be submerged in this consciousness, with planetary cultures reduced to mere ethnic affectations. This idea is seen as extreme by many (and frightening by some); still, there are those born now who will one day grow to seriously question and conquer the ethnocentricity of their worlds.

2210s

15 - JAMES T. KIRK COMMISSIONED AS CAPTAIN OF USS ENTERPRISE.

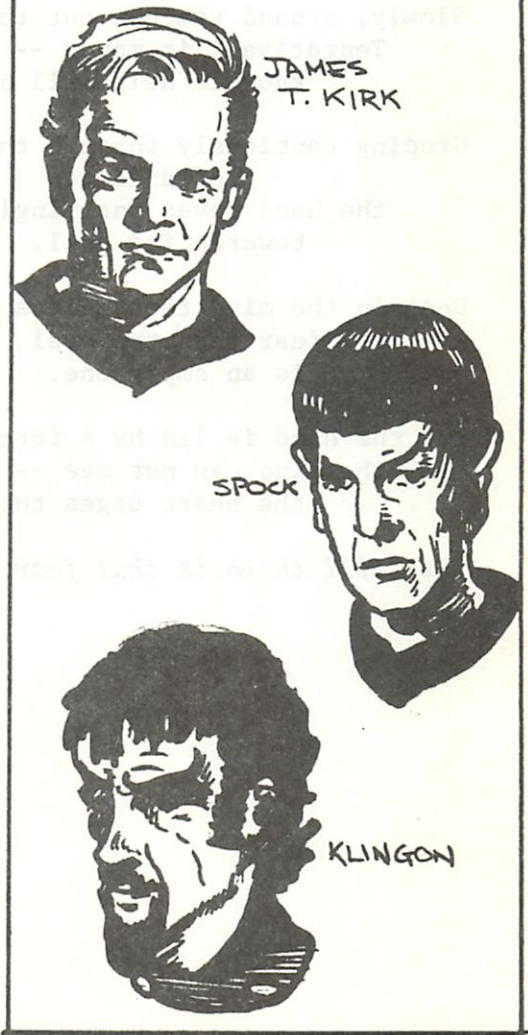
ORGANIAN PEACE TREATY FORESTALLS MAJOR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN UFP AND KLINGON EMPIRE. ROMULANS RE-EMERGE AND ATTACK.

16 - BABEL CONFERENCE RE-AFFIRMS PRIME DIRECTIVE THROUGH ADMISSION OF CORIDON SYSTEM TO UFP. The controversy of this admission points out some of the back-sliding evident on the PD principle, and how the distant threat of war can undermine beliefs, not to mention the anonymity of distances. Terra relishes the comeuppance that Tellar (one of the PD's prime supporters) suffers at Babel. Important in diplomatic circles, and perhaps for futuristic theorists, is the reconciliation of Commander Spock and Ambassador Sarek. Not only is the person they see as the future Ambassador and Councilor a being with deep ties in Star Fleet and on many planets, he is also a symbol of merging cultures, understanding between races, and the possible reunion of the two planets with the most leadership ability in the UFP, Terra and Vulcan.

The long years of relative peace in this part of the galaxy seem to be ending despite the recent efforts of the Organians. Klingon tactics to circumvent the Treaty are becoming more sophisticated, Romulan violations of the Neutral Zone are increasing, and even the Kzin activities are expanding beyond simple piracy. There are rumors of discontent among the warrior races of the UFP, and Orion sabotage is escalating.

20 - Fortieth anniversary of the construction of the Constitution-size starship, USS Enterprise.

...And so it goes



BEFORE & AFTER

Slowly, a hand reaches out for help.
Tentatively it moves -- for it does not
know if help will be there.

Groping cautiously through the maze
of dilemmas
the hand moves unerringly
towards its goal.

Deep in the mind that guides the hand is
the fear that the goal
is an empty one.

But the hand is led by a force
the mind can not see --
the heart urges the hand on.

But still there is that fear...

The night is clear and peaceful.
The stars shine brightly.
My mind stands in awe before the wonders
of the Universe that stretch out
before me.

Images dart in and out of my consciousness
as the mind strives to comprehend
that which it perceives.

The more it perceives the more vivid the
images,
The more vivid the images the more profound
my delight --

*My delight in the visions of the future they
portend -- a future as bright
as the shining stars*

Cynthia Levine



Martha Bonds

and only dreams remain

Darkness...a suffocating absence of sight, of thought. Even reality, that last vestige of human strength and pride, weakens under the chill, impenetrable night, and only dreams remain.

It begins again, the dim, half-reality, the dark dreamworld he has come to know so well. It always starts the same way. He is lying on his belly, a metal surface flat and cold beneath him. He is aware of his mind coming into focus from a great distance, as if consciousness were slowly returning. He draws in a deep lungful of stale air. The same, always the same. It has begun again.

The man reaches out blindly. His hand encounters only empty space and he inches forward, pushing himself along with his hands and toes, not attempting to rise up off his stomach for fear that he might lose track even of the floor.

There...at last he finds the wall. A sensation of dampness stings his fingertips and then his cheek as he pulls closer, leaning against it. His hands move ceaselessly, searching for the opening. This time it takes longer than usual and he is perspiring nervously by the time he finally finds it. He trembles perceptively as he lowers his face to the small, oval recess in the wall, knowing it leads to everything -- his light, his life, his only life in this endless wasteland.

Recurring dreams...he'd had them since childhood. Repetitious youthful fears and boogeymen had given way to nightmares in which his ship and crew were lost, in which his friend was lost. Yet this world of blackness and cold was the most forbidding and terrifying of all his dreams. There was a finality about it, a sense of everlasting sur-reality. And all he really wanted to do was wake up.

First though, he must play it out. He must find the opening in the wall, peer into the emptiness beyond and call the name. Only if he can call loud enough and be answered will he wake up.

Breathing raggedly now, he presses his face to the opening, trying to see through the mist beyond. The name, he must say it. Throat dry, lips parched, voice husky with fear and need, he forces out the word.

"Spock."

He waits. It is taking longer this time. His worst fear, the most dreaded end to the nightmare, is that he

might not be answered. He tries again, his voice a wounded sound crying into the emptiness.

"Spock..."

He strains forward, reaching with heart and mind into the void. "Spock, please."

There is a stirring beyond the wall, a rustle of movement. Then, a touch. Hot, dry fingers reach through the opening in the wall, splay themselves on his forehead and hot, welcome breath flutters against his cheek as a dark, deep voice replies. "Here, Captain. I am here."

Awake. Like a bubble bursting in the sunshine, reality popped into James Kirk's mind. He found himself a tousled heap on his bed, hair in his eyes, covers tangled around his limbs, a corner of the book he had been reading poking him in the back. He pulled the volume out from under him and blinked the sleep from his eyes. A glance at the chronometer told him his alarm was due to go off in a few minutes. He struggled out of the twisted covers and headed for the shower.

He remembered the dream he'd been having and almost shivered at the thought. He twisted the shower dial, though, and the warmth of the sonics drove the last remnants of unease from his memory. Later, as he dressed in his uniform he thought only that he felt amazingly well rested and relaxed after the somewhat morbid dream.

He was in the corridor heading in the direction of the officers' mess when Spock fell into step beside him. "Good morning, Spock," Kirk beamed. "Sleep well?"

"Yes, Captain," the Vulcan answered. "You seem well rested."

"I feel great this morning," Kirk returned expansively. "Ready for anything."

"Indeed. Today may be rather active," Spock observed, reminding Kirk that the ship was on patrol, scanning a newly discovered star system that the Klingons were suspected of invading.

Kirk chuckled. "Well, we've been on a milk-run too long. I want some action."

As if in deference to her captain's wishes, the Enterprise's red alert sounded. Crewmen began running in response as Uhura's voice called General Quarters.

Together, Kirk and Spock headed to the nearest intercom and the captain punched the button. "What's going on, Lieutenant?"

"A Klingon ship, sir," Uhura replied crisply.

"Have they seen us?"

There was a sudden lurch as alien fire power slammed into the starship. Kirk staggered against the bulkhead and shot a look at Spock. There was no need for Uhura's answer. "On my way," he announced, "Kirk out."

The bridge was a flurry of urgent organization. Spock headed straight for his station and Kirk dropped into the command chair, his eyes never leaving the viewscreen.

The Klingon ship launched a second blast. "Shields up," Kirk ordered. "Evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

This time the ship caught only a glancing blow. Kirk turned to Uhura and learned that the ship had refused to answer when she had hailed.

"Looks like they're more in the mood for shooting than talking," Kirk mused. "Okay, Mr. Sulu, let's give them what they want. Change course 27.8 mark 4. Go to warp 6. I want some maneuvering room."

"Aye, sir." Sulu's hands whisked over his controls and the ship veered out of the star system toward open space. The Klingon, taken by surprise, was nevertheless in pursuit.

"Captain," Spock called without raising his eyes from his scanners. "Another Klingon ship, dead ahead."

Kirk rose and stepped to the railing behind Spock. "Are you sure?"

"Captain..." Spock sounded slightly surprised that Kirk doubted his word.

"That's great. I make a break for it, right into their hands." Kirk shook his head.

"You did say you hoped we would find some 'action' today," Spock observed dryly.

"This is not time for joking, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan opened his mouth in protest, but another blast of Klingon phaser power shuddered through the ship. "Port deflector three gone, Captain. Number four weakening," he said instead.

"Casualty reports coming in, sir," Uhura called.

"Damage control, all decks," Kirk ordered. "Sulu, keep our starboard side..."

He did not have time to finish the order. The new Klingon arrival fired again into the already damaged ship. The deck tilted and Kirk was thrown to his knees with a jolt, then pitched forward onto his face. As the lights dimmed he saw Spock's hold on the console slip and the Vulcan dropped to the floor beside him.

He must have struck his head on something. Time seemed to have expanded, to be stretched into a meaningless swirl. The periphery of his vision blurred and the images of his crew - Uhura climbing back into her chair, Chekov and Sulu leaning over their console - seemed an indistinct parody.

Only that which was in his direct line of sight remained normal and unchanged. Spock pulled himself to an unsteady sitting position, brown eyes searching his captain's face.

Kirk clambered under the railing, ready to help Spock to his feet, but a sudden weakening overcame him as he neared the Vulcan. He knelt beside him, their eyes meeting in fierce and fearful contact.

Spock reached out to touch Kirk's shoulders with trembling hands. "Jim. I'm...sorry. I cannot...maintain..."

Kirk shook his head, trying to clear the cobwebs. "Spock, hang on. We'll get through this."

"Captain, you don't understand..."

Kirk reached out to Spock, grasping the Vulcan's arms firmly. He pulled his friend to his feet. For a split second they stood close, eyes still locked together. Then Kirk drew a confident, decisive breath and turned his gaze on the bridge.

Everything snapped back into focus; people moved normally. "Uhura," he called, striding to her station, ready with new orders. He began a message to Starfleet, calculated so that both Klingon ships would overhear, of course. He was all right now. The momentary lapse he had suffered, and that Spock appeared to have shared, was over. He went on, the exhilaration of making command decisions making him forget that in that moment of displaced time and motion there had also been silence and cold.

Kirk found himself leaning against the cushions of his bunk. He blinked, realizing he'd been sitting there, staring into space, for quite some time. He found that he had absolutely no recollection of returning to his quarters.

He rubbed at his forehead, noticing that a headache was starting. He was tired, the battle with the Klingons having sapped his physical and mental energy. It was over though. His Enterprise had routed them, but...but how exactly? What exactly had he done? How had he fought them?

He looked up, hearing for the first time in insistent buzzing at his door. "Come."

Spock entered his cabin, walking somewhat slowly. He moved to the foot of Kirk's bed. "Are you well, Captain?"

Kirk managed a half smile. "Not exactly. I don't know. I seem...disoriented." He cleared his throat. "Status report?"

Spock launched into a detailed commentary on damage repairs, supplying also the basic facts in the battle. Kirk listened intently for a few minutes, Spock's monologue assuring him that all was well with the ship. Still, the captain felt at odds with himself, perplexed and confused. There was a strange sensation in his mind, a tugging at his heart, as if he longed for something.

"Captain? Where are you going?"

Kirk hadn't realized he was stepping into the corridor until Spock's worried question halted him. He turned and was surprised at his own answer. "Observation deck." That was it, he felt confined within his cabin and needed a walk. He smiled at Spock. "Come on. You look like you could use a little relaxing stroll yourself."

The lights on the observation deck were dimmed for early evening and the rich sensations of the room were a balm to Kirk's tired soul and mind. His eyes made a hungry tour of the many-hued flowers, but he walked straight to the viewing port, Spock still at his side.

The stars were there, a twinkling panorama of earnest promises. "Ah, Spock. That's what I needed to see," he murmured. He turned, glancing into the Vulcan's eyes. "You understand them, don't you? What they mean to me...what they do to me..."

There was a warmth in Spock's eyes, a softness to the line of his mouth. "Yes, Jim. I understand. The stars...affect me, too."

Kirk turned to stare out at them again. The stars and their magic, that was what made everything worthwhile, what made sense out of the universe. He could almost forget his earlier feeling of distortion. Yet he was suddenly tired, so very tired. The pinpoints of light swirled before his eyes, their paths a blur of star dust like some trick of time-lapse photography.

He swayed, and though he felt strong arms encircling him in support, Kirk knew he was falling, swirling in circles with the flickering silver star-trails.

He was drifting, falling down a soundless gray tunnel. There was only one sensation in his being -- he was totally alone.

He struck out blindly, arms flailing, legs pumping, as if to run through thin air. Dream-like, his efforts got him nowhere. He continued falling until he landed with a bump on his stomach.

The deck was hard and cold beneath him. He opened his eyes, but found only darkness, chilling absence of light and sound. *No. Not again. Not the dream again.*

"Jim..."

The voice that called his name was deep, deep and full of quiet assurance. Kirk reached out desperately, his hand finding the nap of Spock's shirt. Carefully, his fingers moved upward until they encountered warm flesh. Arms pulled him close as he continued reaching, his hands skimming the firm jaw and chisled features, seeking reality. A gentle touch stroked his head, soothing, banishing the shadows.

He blinked. The darkness was gone, his ragged breathing the only testimony to what he had experienced. He was sitting on the floor, leaning against his first officer's calm support.

"Captain? Are you all right?"

Kirk nodded. "Spock, I...I seem to be suffering some kind of sensory distortion. I...I've had some bad dreams and just now..."

"Shhh...it's gone now."

Kirk looked up at the Vulcan, surprise at his friend's manner overtaking his own confusion. "Spock?"

"You've been over-tired." The Vulcan's voice returned to its normally neutral timbre. "Perhaps the planned visit to the planet below will help."

"Yeah," Kirk returned absently, remembering that they were to make a survey of the world they'd rescued from the Klingons. "Are you okay, Spock?" he questioned, noting that a fine sweat had broken out on his forehead and that a distant look clouded the brown eyes.

"I..." Spock hesitated, then went on. "I suppose I also am somewhat fatigued."

Kirk took a deep breath of cool, clear air. The planet survey was complete, his duty accomplished and he finally permitted himself an appreciative glance at the pristine loveliness around him. "You know, Spock," he said smiling, "this is just what I'd fantasize to be the perfect place."

"Perfect?" Spock asked, amusement gentling his voice.

Kirk nodded. "That beautiful, dense forest we walked through, and now this beach...sometimes I want to leave all my responsibilities behind and settle down in a place like this."

"Do you wish to stay here?"

There was a note of solemnity in the Vulcan's voice now that Kirk apparently missed. "I'd sure like to."

"Yet you do also enjoy your duties as captain of the Enterprise."

"Not as much as you, my overworked friend." Kirk smiled boyishly. "Don't you ever feel the need to just relax in the sun?"

He watched as Spock's eyes scanned the landscape. "Sometimes," he finally answered.

"This place reminds me a little of Vulcan, you know," Kirk continued. "It's warm enough."

"Do you think you would enjoy a visit to Vulcan, Captain?"

"Yeah," Kirk smiled at the idea. "You'll have to come along and show me around, of course." His eyes followed Spock's toward the setting sun. "Look. This sky's so red, it looks almost like Vulcan now."

"Indeed."

"If you could be anywhere," Kirk asked suddenly, "anywhere in the galaxy, where would you be?"

Spock's answer was immediate, but spoken softly. "I am content where I am, at your side."

Kirk turned to look at him and was surprised to see an aching sadness etched on the Vulcan's features, a distant, hurtful look in his eyes. "Spock?"

"Where would you go, Jim?" There was an earnest intensity to the question.

Kirk was at a loss to understand what was happening. Spock's attitude confused him and again he felt the strange longing overtake him, as if he were losing something. He had a sudden impression that Spock was trying desperately to tell him something, but he couldn't understand. That dream, the sensory distortion he'd felt...

Spock was still speaking. "What do you prefer, Jim? The excitement of command or the beauty of a new world?" The brown eyes dropped. "You are the better fantasizer, Captain. I only..."

"Spock, what is it?" Kirk reached out to grasp Spock's shoulders.

The deep brown eyes raised to him, and Kirk felt a surge of intense devotion at the sight of their open and obvious tenderness. Kirk's grip on his shoulders tightened reflexively. "Spock! What's going on?"

"Don't you see, Jim? Look...the sun..."

Kirk followed Spock's gaze to the blazing sunset. The waters caught and dazzled the light, reflected golds and reds, setting the world afire with warmth and color. 'A beach to walk on...' Sights like this drew him even more irresistibly than the stars, probably because they were harder to come by. Kirk felt suddenly at peace, no longer tired. The beauty filled his heart, his mind, overpowering his senses. Spock was right, the perfection of all his fantasies...Spock...

"Spock?"

The Vulcan was trembling, sweat beading his face, as if he were sustaining some terrible power. "Jim...I'm sorry. I can't..."

Kirk tried to catch him as he fell, but the Vulcan's weight dragged him down. They sprawled on the sand together, Kirk's growing confusion mingling with fear as one thin Vulcan hand reached out toward his face. His last awareness was that of the blindingly beautiful sun and the sound of crashing waves.

He was leaning against a cool, damp wall, his face pressed against a low opening. The absence of light and sensation was suffocating, ripping away his self-control and command discipline.

He was dreaming...he was dreaming...and all he wanted to do was wake up.

"Spock...Spock...SPOCK!"

There was no answer. He waited a very long time, but there was no answer and he knew he couldn't wake up without one.

He moved. There had to be something, some way. Kirk pushed at the opening and suddenly the metal of the wall gave under his hands, its consistency altered. He was able to tear at it, to widen the hole until it was large enough for him to crawl through.

He started to go through the wall and bumped his cheek against it. He felt something soft on his face and reached up. Something...some sort of fabric was tied around his eyes. He pulled it away and found he could see a little. He sighed. That was the way with dreams. He had thought it was dark and all the while he'd just been blindfolded. The light in this place was dim, but he could make out hazy shapes beyond. Now he would find Spock.

He crawled through the opening he'd torn in the wall and inched his way forward into the unknown, searching for his friend.

There...there he lay, crumpled in a blue heap. Kirk hurried toward him and knelt beside the still figure. Spock lay curled on his side, barely breathing. Gently, Kirk turned him over. The captain gasped when he caught sight of the haggard features, the listless expression in the half-open eyes.

"Spock, Spock, wake up. We've got to wake up and get out of here." Kirk begged, he crooned, he pleaded, but the Vulcan did not stir in his arms.

"Let him rest."

Kirk whirled at the sound of the awesome, alien voice. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"How quickly you humans forget." The rumbling tones seem to vibrate the air. *"Of course, it has been quite some time since I have made my presence known, since I have completed my observations and tests. I suppose, however, that your disorientation is temporary. You will remember. That is the way you will continue, you and your friend."*

"What's going on? You don't belong in my dream."

"Be grateful that your friend has kept me out this long. But he has grown weak and ill. I am allowing your condition to change. Do not fear. You will 'dream' again."

The voice stopped and, somehow, Kirk knew that they were alone again.

What did it mean? Where were they? What was he supposed to remember? And what did the voice mean by saying they would dream again? He was dreaming now...wasn't he? This was a dream...

Spock stirred in his arms, a low moan escaping his lips. "Jim...wake up...wake me up..."

"Spock. Yes, we've got to wake up."

The Vulcan's eyes opened and snapped into sharp focus. He took in his surroundings and the expression on Kirk's face. "No. Ch, no."

"Spock?"

"Forgive me, Jim. Your dreams were...beautiful. They...helped me, too, but...I couldn't...hold on any longer..."

A cold chill started in the pit of Kirk's stomach and spread throughout his body. Only one thing, the swirl

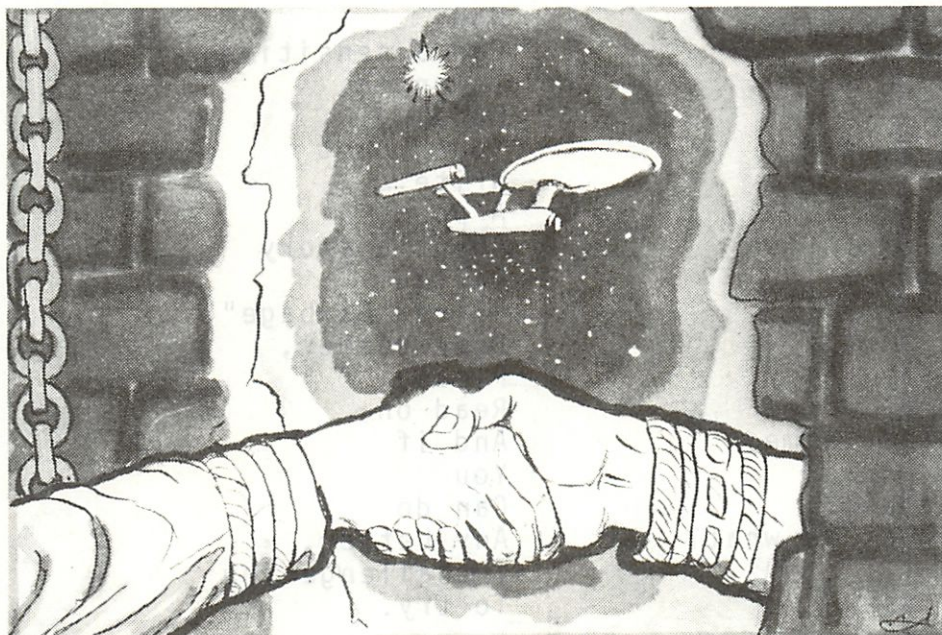
of returning memory, was not numbed by the cold.

This dream...this everlasting, surrealistic dream...it...wasn't...

"Spock, how long have we been here?"

"I've lost track of time, Captain. Months...years perhaps, I...don't know anymore."

The cold penetrated every nerve now, wrenching him insidiously away from all dreams of contentment, of life. He remembered...the alien planet, the barely registering life-form...he and Spock caught in some kind of beam, losing consciousness only to awaken in this dark pit of everlasting confinement...specimens...separated by the wall, only allowed to reach through, to touch hands...neglected finally by their captor...neglected to live half-alive, to lose all sense of their own reality...



And Spock had reached through the wall with his mind, becoming Kirk's anchor, his life, his world. "You... dreamed, fantasized for me, with me, so I could...live..." Kirk's voice cracked on hopeless tears.

Spock's arms slowly went around him. "For us both, Jim."

Their prison was growing darker now, but Kirk closed his eyes to it, drawing Spock ever nearer, holding him close, rocking his exhausted form, soothing him as best he could.

Sleep would come finally. And only dreams would remain.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION OR

BY ANY OTHER NAME

What's in a name?
This story
By any other name
Would smell
As sweet.
Or is it
Stink as sweet?
Or maybe
Pungent,
Or maybe
Just plain
Smell.
Perhaps
I could say,
This story
By any other name
Would be
As odiferous...
As odiferous as what?
And
Should I use
Story?
Perhaps
I should say
This piece of prose
By any other name...
But
Can I
Even call it prose?

Shit!

How
Can a sensitive,
Talented,
Budding,
Young poet
Write
A poem
About a story
Called
"First Garbage"?
Dear reader,
Please,
Read on,
And if
You
Can do
Any better,
I challenge you
To try.

I quit!

Editors' Note: This poem was found tied to a rock thrown through the editors' window. It had no signature, only this note:
"I hope you're happy now that 'First Garbage' has driven me to gafiate from fandom!"

IRS CARBAC

OR

THE PLAGUE'S THE THING

OR

A DREAM OF PLAGUES

OR

ARE YOU SURE YOU REALLY WANT TO READ THIS?

Written by the Federation Bullthrowers, Inc. (commonly known as the **F.B.I.**), who are cowardly represented by Krass, Gross and B'Mundane* (vulgarly known as the **K.G.B.**), Attorneys-at-Law, who will willingly divest themselves of their clients upon service of suit.

*The "B" is silent

Spock returned to consciousness. He surveyed his surroundings, surprised to find himself in Sickbay - again! *Damn!* he thought. *I can't seem to be able to spend five minutes on the bridge anymore.*

"How do you feel?" McCoy asked.

"With my hands. And you?"

"You contracted the disease. The captain and I found you on the floor of your quarters."

She wasn't there at the time, I hope, Spock thought. He attempted to rise; the blanket twitched.

"Lie still. You're not out of danger yet," McCoy leered evilly, rubbing his hands together.

Spock leaned back and closed his eyes. McCoy looked at him, open-mouthed. *Shit! Another golden opportunity down the old porcelain facility! Well, well. No arguments. Maybe there's hope for you yet,* McCoy thought bemused. Bemused was still on his face when Kirk appeared in Sickbay.

"What's so funny? Another patient kick the bucket?"

"No, no. Nothing so fortunate." McCoy pointed to Spock. "He just went back to sleep without a smart-ass comment."

"That's not like Spock at all."

"Nevertheless, it happened," McCoy declared. "Must be something wrong with his script." He could see the concern on Kirk's face for the 786th time and took pity on his captain. After all, it *was* "Be Kind to Twits" Week. "What's the matter, Jim? A touch of the trots? you couldn't get laid this shift? another command headache? do you need Spock to hold your hand?"

Kirk relaxed slightly. "You hit the nail on the head, Bones."

"Which one?"

"All of them. Now, how are the rest of your patients doing?"

"Improving." *Drats,* McCoy thought to himself. "The serum, a derivative of Masiform D, is working. Of course, recovery time is different for each species, but I think they'll all be able to make the climb out of bed in about ten days."

"Shit," Kirk muttered. "There goes the neighborhood."

"I'll be releasing Christine tomorrow."

"Tired of her already, Bones? Or did she find the keys to the handcuffs?" Kirk winked conspiratorially at his friend.

The soothing sounds of their voices probed into Spock's subconscious as he drifted into much needed sleep. One sehlats, two sehlats...

Okay, folks, here comes the old dream sequence...

Spock was suddenly aware that Lieutenant Uhura was trying to get his attention. He turned. "Lieutenant, put your tights back on."

"So soon, Mr. Spock, sugah? By the bye, I'm receiving a message from Starfleet Command."

Who else? Butinskis, Spock thought. Uhura had been watching the first officer, aware that his concentration was not on the bridge. She shook her head with puzzlement. The poor dear didn't understand too much.

"Put it on the screen, Lieutenant," he ordered. After a few seconds, sounding slightly exasperated, he said, "The message, Lieutenant. Just the message..."

A worried Admiral Snark appeared. "Commander, I'll get straight to the point. We have received distress signals from Ambrosia via its twin planet Nectar, in the Delta Triad sector, and there has been no word from the Vulcan research ship *UZI* in three days. A plague of unknown origin has laid...out the entire planet. Lucky damned planet! The situation has become critical for the 636th time, and despite an interstellar fleet of twelve starships, twenty-four light cruisers, six or seven dozen destroyer-class ships, and a couple of old garbage scows, the *ENTERPRISE* is the only ship in the immediate area."

Spock muttered, "What else is new?" Mutter, mutter.

"You are hereby ordered to leave Rigel and head for Ambrosia to investigate, and while you're there, so it shouldn't be a total loss, refuel at Nectar. It is imperative that the source of the plague be isolated immediately so that we can infect the Romulans. I can not emphasize too strongly that you must insure the survival of Ambrosia."

"Why?" Spock queried, a look of benign innocence on his face.

"They're getting very testy on Olympus, and Zeus' lightning bolts have been screwing up subspace radio ever since their bag of munchies ran out."



"Acknowledged, Admiral. Spock out." He turned to Sulu and ordered the course change. "Warp 5, Mr. Sulu."

"But, Mr. Spock, with 6 you get eggroll!"

"Then Warp 6, Mr. Sulu, and don't forget the duck sauce!"

"Aye, aye, sir. Heigh-ho, S'ilver - Away!"

Spock touched a button on the command console. "Ooh, that felt good." He paused a moment to savor the sensation. "The sensuous Vulcan strikes again!" he mumbled. *Mumble, mumble.*

Lieutenant Uhura whispered, "Spock, sugah, that still hasn't come out, and it's stardate unknown."

Spock chortled to himself, chortle, chortle, and *slowly* pushed the button again. "Jim, darling...uh, I mean Captain Kirk, please report to the menagerie - I mean, the bridge."

"What now?"

"It's Plot 47B."

"Not the incurable plague again?! What did we do the last time? Do it again. I'm busy!" *Lub-dub.*

"Bridge to Doctor McCoy."

"McCoy here." *Lub-dub.*

"Doctor, a plague of unknown origin --"

"Not 47B again!"

"Please correlate medical data on all biological life on that planet and bring it to top - I mean, topside, immediately."

"You mean...*Lub...*you don't want it...*dub...*yesterday? *Lub-dub.* I don't know what I'm going to do with all this free time..." *Lub-dub.*

"Doctor, time is the one thing we do not have," Spock retorted.

"We never do," McCoy sighed. *Lub-dub.* "All right, but give me chance. Alnitah few more minutes. McCoy out." *Lub-...*

Spock walked to the library computer - *Ah, Love* - and caressed it. He was fondling, er - programming the computer when the tribblelift doors opened, revealing Captain Kirk in all his glory and there was a lot of glory... orange, too!

"Status report, Mr. Spock," he said, closing the velcro fastening on his fly. *Ooh, that smarts!*

"Jim, they're plaguing our song. E.A.T. Ambrosia in ten hours twelve point some-odd minutes," he responded without removing his eyes from the computer panel.

Smart-ass Vulcan, Kirk thought.

"Fascinating," Spock murmured. *Murmur, murmur.*

"What is it, Spock? Have you discovered something?"

"To be more precise, Captain, the computer has. She's a smart old girl."

"What do you mean 'old', Vulcan?" said the computer.

Spock patted the console. "Later."

"Much later," the computer replied. Spock's shoulders sagged. He sniffed indignantly and turned toward Kirk. "Based on the ecological surveys of Ambrosia, the source of the infection appears to be the *UZI*."

"Are you sure, Spock?"

"Based on the data in hand, it is the most probable theory, Captain." *Why does he always doubt my word?* "I'll know more when I receive the doctor's findings."

"But all the members of the *UZI* crew were given spectrum immunizations. How could they be the source of the infection?" Kirk asked dumbly.

"Somebody blew it, Captain."

"Can we isolate the disease?" asked Kirk, thinking of the ramifications of Spock's theory.

"Isolate it? We can't even spell it!"

"I'm the captain. If I say you're going to isolate it, you're going to isolate it."

"Not without closer examination."

"Lieutenant Uhura, report Mr. Spock's findings to Starfleet."

Spock, enslaved by his attraction for the console, turned back to the computer. The bridge was quiet, everyone absorbed in his or her task. The watch continued uneventfully as the *ENTERPRISE* muddled her way through warped space and fell into interphase. Kirk stretched and rose,...

"Captain, not on the bridge!"

...moving toward the tribblelift. "Mr. Spock, you have the conn. I'll be in my quarters."

"Acknowledged, Captain...for the 946th time. I hope she solves your problem," Spock replied as Kirk disappeared from view. He moved to the command chair, eyes focused on the main screen as a voluptuous mermaid swam by.

Sometime later, McCoy entered the bridge. "Spock, here are those medical tapes you wanted....Spo--?" The doctor suddenly was aware of the main screen. "Spock, don't you know you're not supposed to run the X-rated movies in front of the children?"

Spock turned; his eyes slowly focused on McCoy standing beside him, tapes in hand. Abruptly he broke into song: "Every party has a pooper --" Sulu took up the line: "-- that's why we invited you."

"Party pooper! Party pooper!" the crew chorused.

"Thank you, Doctor. Are these X-rated?" he asked hopefully, rising to move to the computer. Any excuse to get closer to old Tin Lizzie.

McCoy watched him, noting with his physician's eye the slow movement of his steps. *Strange*, McCoy thought, *if I didn't know better, I could almost believe that Spock had forgotten his hustle lessons. A shame to let all that practice go to waste...* With that thought in mind, he waltzed over to join the Vulcan at the computer. *Always was the old-fashioned type myself*, he thought.

"Most interesting," babeled Spock, babel 6? babel 7?, as he stared at the display screen.

"What's 'interesting'?" McCoy asked.

"Your medical data confirms the original hypothesis. It *is* an X-rated film, and the *UZI* is the source of the infection."

Sulu piped up. "Will penicillin help?"

"If not, how about wodka?" chimed in Chekov.

"There is nothing we can do until we arrive at Ambrosia," replied McCoy. "Look at the script and you'll see, but I *would* like to study the tapes before we get there. I could use a good..." He held out his hand.

As Spock reached to remove the tapes, his hand thrust against several buttons. "Hoh, boy! Summer's end and the antheriums are blooming!" cooed the computer. Spock straightened, curious dismay written clearly on his face, and quickly activated other buttons. "Doctor, you will have to wait. I will run another tape and relay it directly to your office."

McCoy stared with swiftly rising curiosity, among other things, but he refrained from comment. He read the expression on Spock's face which indicated that no arguments would be accepted. "All right, my Vulcan plomeek, er-friend," he said, turning toward the tribblelift. "Inform me when the results are ready."

Spock was trying to explain to the Prime Minister for the 223rd time that Captain Kirk had been momentarily delayed by a time warp and was on his way. "He is coming, Your Excellency. I assure you, he is coming." The head of Ambrosia had been insulted that the captain was not there and Spock was attempting to maintain control when Kirk entered the bridge.

"The Prime Minister is waiting, Captain. He is rather indignant about the delay."

"All right, Spock....Your Excellency, I am Captain James T. Kirk."

"I know who you are, Captain. Who doesn't?" *He's on Klingon wanted posters all over the galaxy and he tells me who he is.* "Please explain why I have been kept waiting. You are aware of the emergency we face."

Kirk looked at the screen, his satisfied expression wiped away by annoyance. "I apologize for the delay, Your Excellency. It was unavoidable." *But well worth it!*

The Prime Minister cut him off. "The situation is critical for --"

Kirk immediately interrupted. "Don't say it."

"As you wish, Captain. Three-quarters of the population, including a Federation representative and several members of the *UZI*, have succumbed to this plague. Everybody else is having a ball. Our medical people are unable to do anything. Neither, it seems, are yours. What kind of incompetents is the Federation sending these days?"

Kirk, aware of Spock's presence beside him, formed his words carefully. "Only the best kind, Your Excellency."

Spock interrupted. "Your Excellency, the medical facilities of both the *ENTERPRISE* and the Federation are being placed at your disposal. Do we have your permission to beam down a medical team to examine the situation firsthand? Secondhand? Thirdhand...?"

"That will place your people in jeopardy, or concentration, or on the 20,000 credit obelisk, whatever. The plague is not selective. It loves everybody indiscriminantly."

"We are aware of the dangers, sir," Kirk replied, stunned by Spock's lack of manners. "We are willing to take the chance. It may be the only one your people have."

"All right, Captain," the Prime Minister agreed reluctantly. *Look up all the women...except the infected ones.*

"Thank you. We shall beam down in ten minutes. Kirk out." He turned to his first officer, curiosity foremost in his mind. "Opinion, Mr. Spock?"

"The Prime Minister apparently blames the Federation for the plague," replied Spock.

"How can you tell?"

"I peeked ahead to the end of this disaster," Spock calmly answered.

"Are you suggesting tact?"

"Among other things, Captain."

Kirk, unwilling to reprimand a fellow officer in front of the rest of the crew, turned to Lieutenant Uhura. "Have Doctor McCoy report to the transporter room with a medical team. Coming, Mr. Spock?"

"Captain, I do not wish to disobey your orders, but I respectfully request permission to remain on board."

"Explain."

Can't you figure anything out for yourself? "Since we have theorized that the source of the plague is the UZI, and the crew of the UZI is 99 and 44/100% Vulcan, it is logical to assume that the Vulcans are the carriers. If I were to beam down to the surface, the probability of spreading the infection would increase. Besides, I have better things to do," he replied. His hand absently groped for the computer panel.

"Very well, Spock. You have the conn. We shall transmit our findings directly to the library computer. You will correlate data from here."

"Acknowledged, Captain." A small grin started to form at the corners of his mouth.

Kirk left the bridge as Spock took the command chair. *Something is going on, Kirk thought, and one of these days I'll find out what it is.*

Kirk, McCoy, and a medical team headed by Doctor M'Benga materialized in the Ambrosian Halkan Council chamber. The Prime Minister came to greet the *ENTERPRISE* officers.

"Your Excellency, may I present my Chief Medical Officer, Doctor Leonard McCoy, Doctor M'Benga, and Chief Nurse Jennings."

"Captain," the Prime Minister said, leering at Nurse Jennings, "because of the severity of the situation I suggest we dispense with the formalities. Nurse, come with me. If the rest of you will proceed to the medical laboratory, you can begin your work." He led the way out of the council chambers.

Kirk pulled out his communicator as the medical team followed the Prime Minister. "Kirk to *ENTERPRISE*."

"Spock here, Captain."

"Status report, Mr. Spock."

"We have located the UZI. Sensors indicate some low-life readings aboard."

"Can you beam a party over to investigate?"

"Affirmative, Captain. One is already assembled. And, we were lucky enough to hire a three piece band - at union rates, of course."

"Keep me posted. See if they can give us a hint to what happened." Kirk felt uneasy; there had been a slight edge to Spock's voice that he couldn't overlook. And there *had* been that incident on the bridge. His thoughts were interrupted by the communicator's bleep.

"McCoy to Kirk."

"Kirk here. What is it, Bones?"

"I think you'd better come."

From the tone of his voice, Kirk knew better than to argue. "All right, Bones. On my way."

As he entered the medical lab, McCoy dragged him into another room. "What's the matter, Bones?"

McCoy led Kirk over to a bed in the corner. "Hello, Captain." The occupant looked up at him happily.

"Christine!" Kirk climbed in next to her and took her hand. It was all she'd give him! "It's good to see you."

"Now that you and Doctor McCoy are here, I feel much better." She took McCoy's arm and pulled him in on the other side, then sank back on the pillows and closed her eyes blissfully. McCoy leaned over to give her some mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and cracked skulls with Kirk who was about to do the same.

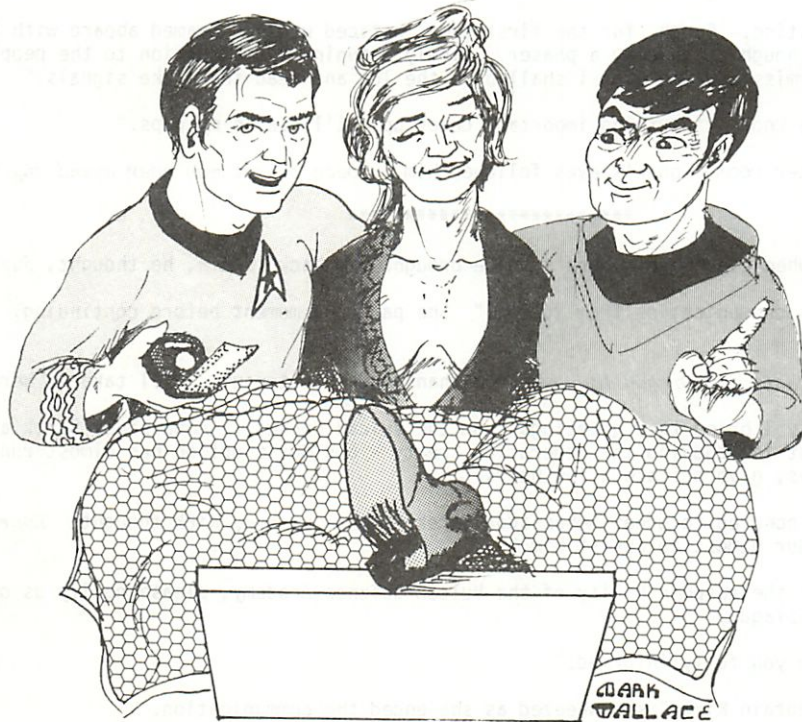
"Bones, is there anything else you can do?"

"I've done all I can. The medical care is superb, considering that the doctors don't know what they're doing. But, I will need the *ENTERPRISE* computers for an alpha continuum."

"Let's beam up then."

"I'd like to bring Christine with us. She may respond better in familiar surroundings." D.O.M.

"All right, Bones," Kirk said. "Kirk to *ENTERPRISE*. Three to beam up. Have a king-size bed standing by." The familiar transporter whine enfolded them.



Spock sat in the command chair, staring at the projection of the diseased planet below them. Above it there was a full moon rising. *Tuc-ret! No movies tonight!* Bridge personnel noticed the tightening of his jaw. Speculation ran high. Was it pon farr or merely a gas pain? Time would tell... He closed his eyes and ignored them. Lost in thought, or space, as the case may be, he was interrupted by the sound of the tribblelift doors opening.

"Hey, Dad! I'm home!"

Spock turned and raised his eyes to the dome on top of the bridge. "Did you ever have one of *those* days?" he voiced aloud, hoping for some relief to what could be a mission impossible. He turned to the small elfin figure standing in the doorway. "Get lost, Child. You're in the wrong universe!"

"You'll be sorry," warned the Kid as he disappeared from view. The tribblelift doors did not close.

Spock noticed what appeared to be a part of a mechanical device lying by the lift doors, but before he could investigate, he was interrupted by Lieutenant Uhura's cry.

"Mr. Spock, a communication from the *UZI*."

"Chekov here, Mr. Spock."

"Status report, Mr. Chekov."

He's as bad as the Kepten. "Most of the crew are dead, sir. But we found forty-three people barely alive. Suggest medical team beam over immediately with clothes."

"Agreed, Mr. Chekov. Have you found the *UZI* log?"

"Affirmative."

"You will beam over with it immediately. The rest of your team will remain and assist the medical team. I will meet you in the transporter room. Spock out."

After beaming back, Kirk noticed the transporter room was a bit crowded. Maybe a king-size bed hadn't been such a good idea. *It isn't rush hour. Wonder what's happening now?*

While McCoy was supervising Christine's removal to Sickbay, Kirk limped over to join Spock and Chekov who were deeply engrossed in conversation. "Status report, gentlemen."

Spock thought, *Doesn't he ever know anything?* "A medical team is preparing to beam over to the *UZI*, Captain. There are several people still alive, but, as for the silent majority, they're dead, Jim."

Kirk gave his first officer the evil eye: *You'll get yours, Vulcan.* Spock returned the look: *Promises, promises.*

"What's that?" Kirk asked, nodding toward the wood in Spock's hand.

"The *UZI* log, Captain. It might give us a clue to what happened."

McCoy rolled by with Christine. Spock, for the first time, noticed who had beamed aboard with Kirk and McCoy. He stood there transfixed, as though stunned by a phaser. Slowly retuning his attention to the people around him, he said quietly, "With your permission, Captain, I shall burn the log and read the smoke signals."

"All right, Spock. Let me know if anything important comes up. I'll be in my cups."

As Kirk left the transporter room, Spock's eyes followed him. *Doesn't that man ever spend any time on the bridge?*

Kirk was pacing his cups when Lieutenant Uhura's voice brought him back. *Damn, he thought, just as I was...*

"Captain, I am receiving a communication from Vulcan." She paused a moment before continuing. "T'Pau wishes to speak to you personally, sir."

T'Pau, Jim thought. Now what does Dragon Lady want? "Thank you, Lieutenant. I'll take it here."

"Captain Kirk. Reluctantly I bring thee greetings from the Vulcan Council. Ambassador Sarek and his wife are journeying to Ambrosia to assist in renewing the Federation treaty - our movie option has almost run out. They will arrive in two standard days, give or take a few hours."

"The *ENTERPRISE* is always honored to greet Ambassador Sarek." *Sure we are, Kirk thought. Every time he comes, there's trouble.* "We will do our utmost to assist him."

"Captain, since the *UZI* is the responsibility of the Vulcan Science Academy, please notify us of any developments on the isolation of this plague."

"Certainly. We shall keep you fully informed."

"Live long and prosper, Captain Kirk," she wheezed as she ended the communication.

Kirk stared at the blank viewer. *Witch!* He was interrupted by the door. "Come," he said as he activated the mechanism. The door slid open to reveal a decidedly uncomfortable Spock slouching in the doorway.

"Spock, stand up straight, and come in. I was just about to contact you."

"Indeed, Captain."

"I have just received word from T'Pau that your parents will be meeting us at Ambrosia."

Dammit, Spock cursed. I thought I got rid of them when I joined Starfleet. Will they never leave me alone? He appeared to take the news calmly; however, Jim could read the Vulcan well and it was quite noticeable that his control wasn't as steady as usual. "Is there anything else, Captain?"

"Yes, Spock. Please explain your behavior on the bridge earlier. You interrupted me while I was conducting a galactic discourse with the Prime Minister. Don't you know you're not supposed to interrupt your captain?"

Spock remained standing, rooted to the spot, hands clasped around his Kraith cup, trying to gather inner strength to begin. He started to pace the floor slowly as his palms began to sweat. The cup slipped. But then, there's many a slip twixt the cup and --. Kirk was struck by the image of a caged panther.

"First things first, Jim. Before I can explain what caused my actions, you must understand. There is no alternative..."

From the tone of Spock's voice, Kirk realized that he would have to handle Spock with kid gloves. *Shit! My best pair is in the laundry!* One mis-step and he would ruin everything. And how many years had he been waiting for Spock to reveal a hidden flaw, a hidden virtue, anything at all! *Constipated damned Vulcan!*

"Will it help if I told you that I understand what's troubling you? Is it your mother? The computer? Give me a hint, huh?"

Spock's look of 'mind-your-own-beeswax' told Kirk he had been right. Spock could never handle an emotional scene -- or R&R, either.

"That's the problem. When I saw Christine, I realized that I *had* blown it. I never should have let her go. After all, my seven years are almost up, not to mention my contract options."

"Don't worry about it, Spock. I'm sure you two can work something out. It's not a new situation. Men have been living through it since the time of the beginning, if you receive my meaning..."

"What would you know about it, off-worlder?"

"Heaven knows how many times I myself have gone through it."

"Heaven, Captain? I would think it would be just the opposite."

Spock's left eyebrow lowered. Kirk thought, *He seems to be in control...*

Seeing the grin on Kirk's face, something deep inside Spock snapped. Tears appeared in his eyes. *Oops, get the Kleenex™*, Kirk decided, as he reached for the box next to his bed and handed it to the Vulcan. Kirk moved to the other end of the room. The sight of Spock, crying, was more than he could handle. Actually, it brought on an overwhelming desire to giggle and he sensed that it would be better not to laugh at his first officer.

Moments later, he turned back to face his friend. "Spock, there is nothing to be ashamed of," he pleaded. "Crying releases pent-up tensions. Spock, you are a psychotic jumble of complications, and repressed desires -- in short, half-human."

Spock nearly lost his control again. The tears had stopped, but he could not speak.

"Don't fight it. It's bigger than both of you."

"Jim," he replied, still fighting for control. His voice was harsh. "I have lost her. What am I going to do?"

"Call Lost and Found." He paused. "Now, listen, Spock, Christine will be on board for a while, recuperating. Talk to her. I'm sure she'll listen and help you. After all, she's a Girl Scout. She's always prepared. And if that doesn't work, there's always force."

"You're probably right, Jim. I'll talk to her later. By the way, if this works, may I be relieved from duty for a while?"

"Of course. You don't think I'd permit that kind of thing on the bridge, do you?"

"Of course not, Captain. Sorry I asked."

The intercom interrupted. "Sulu here, Captain. Will you and Mr. Spock please report to the bridge? Mr. Chekov has found something in the ashes of the *UZI* log that might interest you."

"On our way, Mr. Sulu. Kirk out."

Back to reality, folks! But first, a word from our sponsor.

This part of "First Garbage, or...etc." is brought to you by your local Lincoln Enterprises dealer.

INSTANT REPLAY (?):

Spock slowly returned to consciousness. *Where am I?* Spock thought groggily. He couldn't focus his vision. There was someone, a woman, standing over him, a voice speaking softly. *Christine...what was she doing on the ENTERPRISE?* It required too much effort to voice the question. He lapsed back into unconsciousness. Three sehlat...

"I'm sorry I disturbed you, Doctor." Nurse Jennings' voice was apologetic. "I thought for a moment that Mr. Spock was regaining consciousness. I guess I was wrong...for the 947th time."

When Kirk and Spock entered the bridge, they were greeted by loud cheers. Kirk moved over to the command chair, grinning at his reception. As Spock went over to his station, a young, soon-to-be-demised -- after all, he is a security guard -- ensign stopped him, pointed to Kirk, and asked "Who's that?" Spock shrugged his shoulders and continued.

"What is so important, Mr. Chekov?" he asked, as Chekov moved out of the direct path between Spock and his beloved computer. No dummy, that Russian.

"The *UZI* ashes, Mr. Spock, have an entry that might, uh, interest you."

As the entry in question played, Spock leered at the display screen, one eyebrow raised almost to the hairline. Quickly, he lowered it. *That is painful. Better not do that again. Otherwise the scotch tape will come loose.*

Having noted Spock's reaction, Kirk, not wanting to be left out in the cold, quickly moved to a spot behind his first officer, where he could observe for himself. *Why should Spock have all the fun?* He was just becoming absorbed in the display when Lieutenant Uhura interrupted.

"Captain, the transporter room..."

"Not now, Lieutenant. I'm busy. Tell them to call back later."

"But, Captain..."

"Don't 'but Captain' me." He turned, gave her a glower that made her quiver in her boots, and quickly returned his attention to Spock's display screen.

"What does this mean, Spock? Can you discern a clue from this?"

"In a minute, Captain..." Spock mumbled, mumble, mumble, his eyes absorbed on the computer readout.

Kirk stood impatiently as Spock pushed the instant replay. *Shit! I hate re-runs!* At that moment, Kirk heard the tribblelift doors open. He turned, fully expecting McCoy to appear, and was disappointed to see Ambassador Sarek disembark with Dippy Broad. Kirk mused, *Tacky, tacky...but he always did have to have a sweet young thing hanging on his arm.*

"Greetings and salutations, Dippy...Ambassador."

The Ambassador and D.B. moved toward Spock's station. Curiosity is not reserved for nosy humans.

"Father," Spock greeted, reluctantly pulling his eyes out of the computer.

"Have you isolated the plague, my son?"

"The *UZI* ashes have given us the probable solution."

"Specify."

Kirk sighed and muttered to Spock, "Play it again, Sam."

Spock coldly ignored his captain and played the entry for Sarek. "Interesting," the Ambassador commented. "I suggest we now have a plague of *known* origin."

"Indeed, Father." Spock's eyebrow partially rose. *I am not going through that again.* "But, it is the only logical conclusion."

"I'm confused," Kirk said.

Par for the course, Spock thought.

"Somebody help the captain!" Kirk pleaded.

"It is quite simple, sir," Spock explained. "It is nothing more than a plot change. Prepare for Plot 47C."



"AAARRRGHHH!!!" the captain was heard to scream as he ran from the bridge, his face a bright shade of green.

"I always suspected that he had Romulan blood," Spock commented.

WRITERS' NOTES:

1. Upon strong advice from timid counsel (read that as upon pain of death by Tal Shaya), we hereby offer our humblest apologies if we have given offense. (If we have not, do not read previous message.) However, honesty compels us to point out that if left to our own devices, we would not...apologize, that is. We calls 'em as we sees 'em.
2. If you think this was First Garbage, watch this space for the second installment: "First Garbage Returned... or, Aw Shit!"



"...He loves me, He loves me not..." © m.e. matyi '77

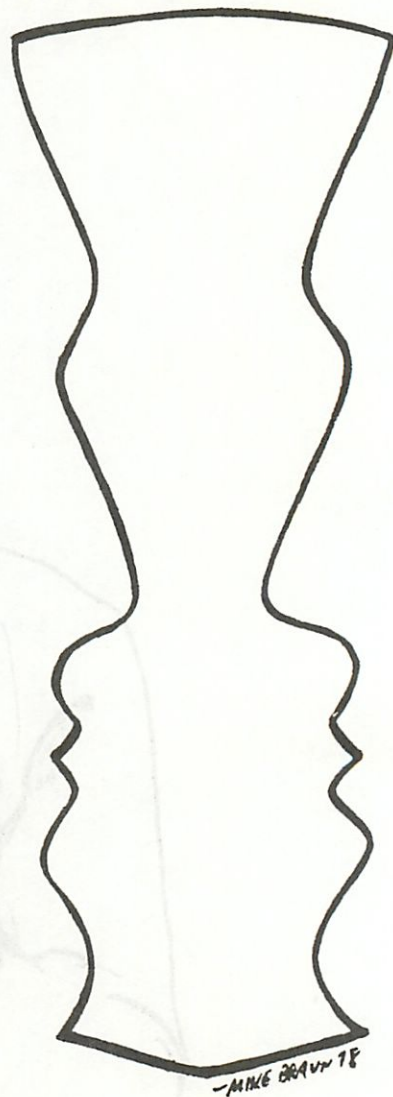
THE CALL

Faint echoes from distant shores
Beckon me.
I come.
Through seas of stars
and galaxies not yet seen
The faint but recognizable whispers
reverberate
in the corridors of my mind.
Did you purposely send the call
winging through the universe?
Or did the signal
emanate from a source
hidden in the depths of you,
seeking answers
as like seeks like?

Known or unknown
it came.
Accompanying a thrill of fear
and the desire to turn away
unheeding
but compelled to answer.
I come.
For I have seen your face
and know you
as a soul kindred to my own,
never meeting
but met
in a time beyond remembering
when we were kin
and shared a common bond.

Now the fingers of our bonding
draw us together
to meet
as if for the first time,
but shards
of unremembered times
will find your consciousness
and you will know then,
as I know now,
that our souls have shared
a common birth.

My need:
to call you friend and brother.
Your need:
to find the truths I have discovered.
These will bring us
face to face
and soul to soul
to the filling of our joy.



Lucy Miner

sibyl hancock

The SENTINEL

It was a desert world with rippling gold sand dunes that shimmered in the heat. A cloudless aquamarine sky arched overhead like an inverted bowl -- the blue-green haze fading to white near the blazing sun. The faint hum of a transporter beam was the only intrusion upon otherwise hushed surroundings.

"Spock! Where are McCoy and the security men?"

"And what happened to our phasers?"

Kirk tried unsuccessfully to raise the Enterprise. "The ion storm Scotty mentioned couldn't possibly be near enough to affect the ship. Was it a transporter malfunction that prevented McCoy and the others from materializing or did someone or something down here arrange for our arrival? Is your tricorder still functional?"

"Affirmative. The signal received aboard ship is still unintelligible, but it is coming from that direction." Spock pointed toward a nearby dune.

Kirk drew the back of his hand across his perspiring brow. "Let's go."

The sand was soft, making it difficult to walk. Negotiating a tall dune proved to be a slippery, sliding climb. When they reached the top, Kirk caught his breath. A tall tower rose out of the sand and spiraled skyward. It appeared to be in good condition, while scattered about were remains of less substantial dwellings. There were no paved roads, just wide paths between the tumbled chalky white ruins, which resembled sun-bleached bones. It appeared to have been a settlement of fair size and all centered about the tower. There were no signs of rusting vehicles or other mechanical conveyances. Had it not been arid, vegetation would certainly have covered the petrified remains long ago.

"Captain, tricorder readings indicate the tower is much older than the other ruins, yet in far better repair."

Kirk watched the pale green tower glisten in the heat. There was something about it that struck an ominous note, perhaps because it stood alone, seemingly untouched by age, when all else lay in decay. Regardless of any foreboding he might feel, Kirk knew that they must find shelter from the scorching rays of the sun.

"We had better move along," Spock said, noting his captain's flushed face. "I think..."

Abruptly the desert vanished, and Spock felt himself being sucked into a gray fog. He was drifting, slowly tumbling head over heels. As quickly as it came, the fog vanished, and Spock was deposited none too gently on a hard, flat surface. Kirk slid into him, throwing them both to their knees.

"What was *that*?" Kirk asked, rubbing his ankle. "Some kind of transporter beam?"

"It would appear so."

Spock stood up, glancing around. They were standing in a chamber dimly lit by a narrow window high above their heads. Cryptic hieroglyphics marked the walls.

"Any idea where we are?" Kirk asked.

"Perhaps," Spock replied. "However, it would be enlightening to look from that window. I shall be glad to support you, if you would care to try."

"All right." Kirk climbed onto Spock's shoulders and held to the wall while his first officer slowly stood.

Only by stretching was Kirk able to see through the opening. The gold desert spread like rolling waves of an ocean reaching as far as the eye could see. The crumbled rubble of ruins lay like tiny splintered matchsticks below.

"The tower!" Kirk exclaimed. "We must be near the top since I can see for miles."

Spock lowered him, then turned to his tricorder. A frown creased his brow.

"What is it?"

Spock's frown grew deeper. "This tower is of incredible age, and my tricorder indicates there is a maze within it -- a network of passages at levels below us. However, the signal we received on the Enterprise appears to emanate from somewhere in this room."

Spock walked over to a wall with a panel of strangely shaped knobs and levers. He ran a fingertip over raised markings. "I've seen symbols like these before," he mused. "Very ancient. Possibly from the Dyzinic peoples."

Kirk whistled. The Dyzinic race was the oldest on Federation archaeological records and not a great deal was known about their civilization. Their race had originated on a warm, wet world, but no one to date had found their home planet. The Dyzinians had disappeared millenia ago, leaving artifacts which were clearly the product of a remarkably advanced culture. Their language code had been broken, but many of the larger pieces of the Dyzinic puzzle remained unsolved.

"Dyzinic," Kirk said softly. "Yes, I would agree that those symbols are very old." He listened intently for a few moments. "I wonder what triggered the signal that brought us here in the first place? And what transported us?"

"It is possible that the Enterprise used a frequency in one of its messages that brought us to the attention of whatever mechanism controls the tower. If I'm not mistaken, this place was designed for dealing with offenders of the law."

Kirk looked around, a cold knot of apprehension tightening around his chest. "I don't know about you, Spock, but I want to get out of here... now."

"Wait!" Spock flung out his arm in warning, but he was too late.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Kirk to..."

A brilliant light flashed from high overhead. Spock threw his arms over his eyes, as did Kirk. A loud creaking heralded the awakening of machinery which had not moved in untold thousands of years. Spock fell to his knees, unable to keep his balance. The walls were moving around -- no -- it was the floor revolving. He crawled closer to Kirk who was lying face down, and closed long, slender fingers over his captain's wrist.

The center of the floor dipped, and they were drawn into a whirling vortex. They were falling faster and faster... then slower and yet slower... tumbling almost gracefully into a bottomless pit.

Far above the desert world, the Enterprise hung in space like a great, elegant bird... a bird that was both deaf and blind. The predicted ion storm held the starship in thrall, muting her sensors and rendering her communications and transporter inoperative.

"Can't we use the shuttlecraft?" McCoy asked. "Isn't there some way we can shield it against the storm?"

Scotty shook his head, a little exasperated at the doctor's refusal to comprehend basic engineering facts. "Dr. McCoy, you know what happens to a shuttlecraft when it's caught in an ion storm. It would be lost in no time or crashed on that planet down there."

"Dammit! Jim and Spock have been down there eight hours. They could be dead by now!"

"The captain and Mr. Spock have been in some pretty tight spots before, and they've always managed to survive." Scotty bit his lip in frustration and frowned at the useless transporter. "I'm no magician."

McCoy choked back a hasty reply. "Sorry, Scotty. When are we going to be able to begin searching for them?"

"I don't know that either, Doctor. Ion storms are that unpredictable. Perhaps it will be soon."

McCoy brought his hand down hard on a desk top and quietly cursed the silent machinery, the ion storm, and the unrelenting fierceness of space in general.

Spock opened his eyes, wincing as pain slammed inside his head, almost thundering in its intensity. He could not remember ever having such a tremendous headache. His neck felt as though someone had tried to twist off his head. He was lying on a spongy surface that gave off a sickeningly sweet odor that may have been the residual fumes of a drug to which he likely had been subjected. Someone was sprawled a few feet away.

Jim!

He sat up too quickly and retched, but managed to subdue the waves of nausea. He tried to observe the surroundings while he crawled toward Kirk. Gray light was coming from somewhere... gray ceiling... gray floor... gray

everything -- a sameness that had an unsettling effect, which didn't help his outraged stomach.

"Jim," he whispered, gently shaking his captain's shoulder.

Kirk opened his eyes. "Where are we?"

"I'm not sure, but I would say somewhere within the tower."

Memory returned as Kirk recalled the turning floor and the fall. He sat up slowly and searched for his communicator.

"Gone," Spock said, "as is my tricorder."

"I saw the communicator on the floor just before we slipped to the center. It was open."

"An open communicator could act as a beacon, but I would not count on its being in good working order. It probably fell through as we did."

Kirk sighed. He was nauseous, and he ached all over. Pain danced a staccato beat behind his eyes. "Thank you for trying to warn me. So we're in a prison."

Spock shook his head. "I think not. The Dyzinians referred to the tower as a sentinel or some such similar term. From what I was able to decipher, I believe this is a type of processing or conditioning station."

"Conditioning? I don't think I like the sound of that."

"Nor do I," Spock agreed. "Our chances for survival do not appear to be good. It is known that the Dyzinic race was not humanoid. Therefore, any processing or conditioning could be..."

Kirk nodded. "Yes, I understand. What's good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Captain?"

"Never mind." A smile played about the corners of Kirk's mouth. "You took tricorder readings before we fell. Did you see any hint of a way for us to escape?"

Spock frowned. "I did note something that looked like an open area. There is a slight chance it is an exit, but I do not know where..."

Kirk stopped him. "It's enough to know there may be a way out. Hold to that thought, Spock. Let's start hunting."

Spock lurched to his feet and helped Kirk step off the spongy mat. The passage was clammy and had a dank, moldy odor.

"The floor appears to tilt slightly downward as we progress," Spock said, his voice low. "That may be a promising sign, since we must descend throughout the interior of this tower."

"It's a tall tower," Kirk said softly.

"Indeed, Captain."

The corridor twisted and turned; curves joined sharp angles as paths crisscrossed and mingled. The gray light dimmed, and it became difficult to see more than a few feet ahead. Kirk's sense of direction disappeared, and he could no longer tell if the path were still leading downhill. The darkness had an almost tangible quality.

"Spock, I..."

"Wait, Captain!" Spock stood still, his body taut with tension.

Kirk heard a murmuring sound, as if hundreds of people were whispering. He didn't just *hear* the whispers; the sounds were crawling inside his head like insects with thousands of legs.

The darkness was swallowed by whorls of shimmering blue, swimming and curling like oil floating on top of water. He could *feel* the azure shade, *smell* a spicy odor, and *taste* a tartness in his mouth. And then the swirling color was inside him, along with the murmurs that crawled on insect legs. He was falling... falling into an endless blue void. He flailed wildly about, trying in vain to touch something. Spock was far in the distance, reaching toward him, but the gulf between them was too great.

"Spock! Spock!" he shouted. "No... reach farther! Try!"

It was hopeless. Kirk saw Spock sinking into the deepening indigo and was filled with an aching loneliness.

"Spock!" he called one last time.

Spock watched as the mist dissolved. He was standing on the bridge of the Enterprise, and the Klingons were attacking with a new weapon that was tearing the ship apart.

"Captain, we can't take much more of this!" Spock shouted.



"Send out a distress call," Kirk said. "Hurry!"

Spock ran to help Uhura, but before he could reach her station, flames erupted on the bridge. People were screaming, running, clawing at turbolift doors that would not open. Spock activated the fire control system, but there was no response... no chance.

"Captain!" he shouted.

Kirk was engulfed in flames, his clothing burning. Spock tried to reach him and felt flames touch his skin. They were white hot, and he drew back in an agony of pain. He was burned, hurting, and yet his skin, his clothes, remained untouched. Not so with the rest of the crew. They were dying, falling to the floor... already corpses, their flesh falling away in charred hunks.

"Spock! Help me!" Kirk cried. "Please!"

Kirk was burning... his bronze hair crisping black, his gold tunic flaking away as flames licked higher. Spock could not move. His legs were immobile, as if rooted to the deck. He had to reach Kirk, had to try and smother the fire, but he could not move. He was frantic. In another moment it would be too late. The greedy, hungry fire was devouring the one person who was more important to him than life itself -- this human who had touched his heart and given him the love he so needed.

"Jim! No..." Spock's voice trailed away as he watched his captain fall, to lie grotesquely across the command chair. The captain was dead, his once fine face destroyed by the raging fire... his firm, muscular body burned away.

"Jim... Jim..."

Somebody moaned nearby. Kirk opened his eyes to the sooty grayness of the tower. He was sprawled on the floor, and a few feet away Spock lay with his knees drawn up against his chest and his hands covering his face.

"Spock," Kirk whispered hoarsely. He started to crawl toward his first officer, and as he moved his strength began to return. Spock was shivering as if he were freezing.

Kirk put his hand on Spock's shoulder and shook him gently. "Spock, come out of it."

Slowly, slender fingers parted, and Spock lowered his hands. His deep brown eyes were haunted and wild. "Jim?" he asked unsteadily.

"It's me," Kirk answered, trying to sound reassuring. "Are you all right?"

Spock allowed Kirk to help him sit up. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. The shivering stopped.

"I think we have just experienced the first phase in the reconditioning process of this tower."

"Did you...?" Spock hesitated. "Did you feel fear, Captain?"

Kirk described the crawling sensations he had felt and the nightmare scene of Spock sinking forever into boundless black space.

Spock shuddered in spite of himself. "I envisioned the Enterprise burning with all the crew except myself engulfed in flames. And there was nothing I could do... nothing." He closed his eyes, again seeing his captain trapped in the inferno that had been the bridge. His stomach lurched as he remembered the charred corpse draped over the command chair. Spock took another deep breath.

"Jim, I do not know what we may face ahead, but it might be better if you continue without me."

Kirk was shocked. "Leave you? Why?"

"That part of me which is Vulcan is more severely affected by the phenomena we have experienced. It was as if I were being torn apart from within. I... my control was affected. Remember, I warned that this tower was constructed to use on Dyzinians, who were not humanoid. Before we ever reach the end of this maze we both may be dead or little better than mental vegetables."

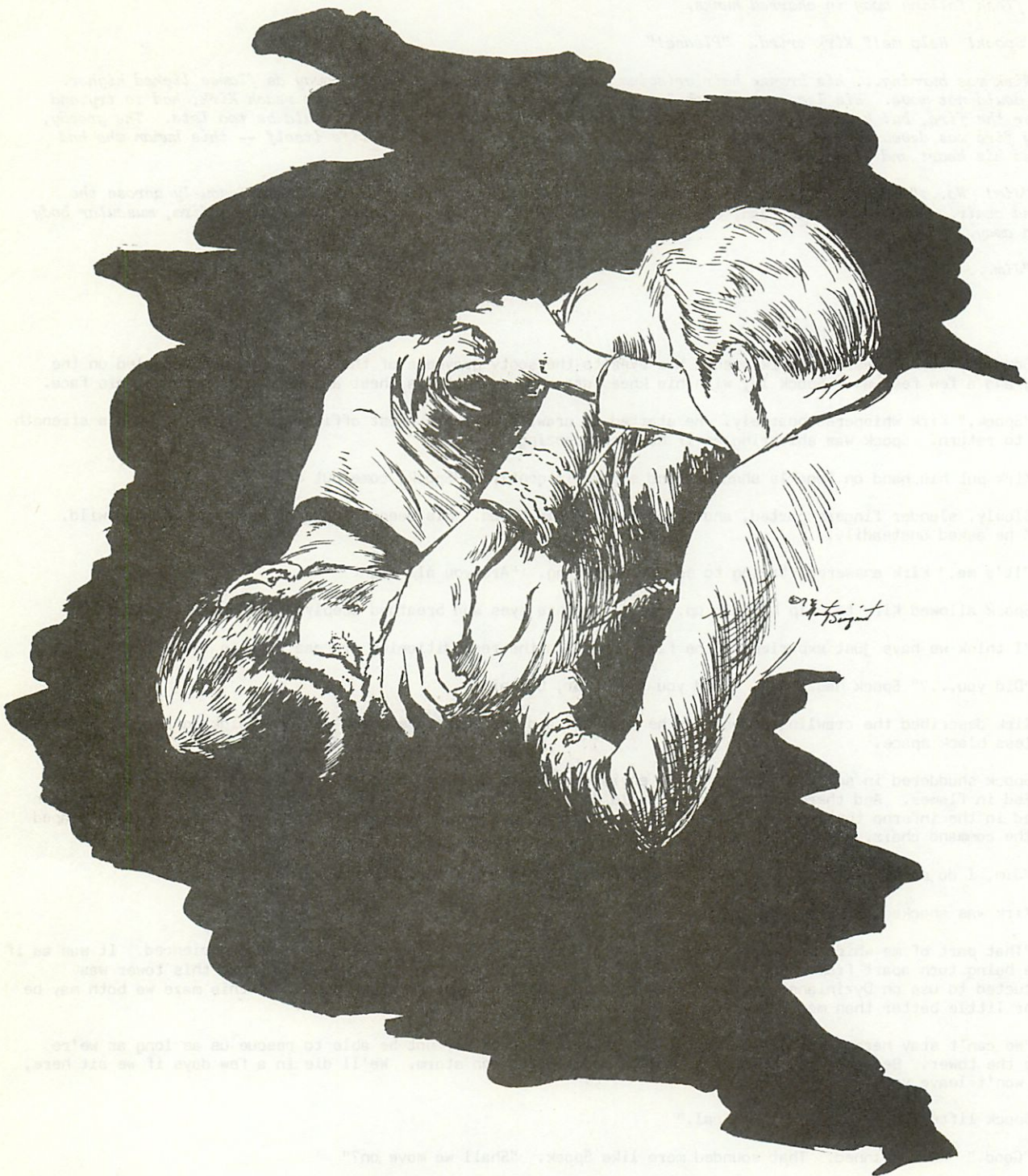
"We can't stay here," Kirk said, matter-of-factly. "Scotty may not be able to rescue us as long as we're inside the tower. Besides, the Enterprise may be dodging the ion storm. We'll die in a few days if we sit here, and I won't leave you."

Spock lifted an eyebrow. "Illogical."

"Good." Kirk grinned. That sounded more like Spock. "Shall we move on?"

Spock nodded.

Silently they began to thread their way down the twisting passages, Spock using his touch telepathy to try and discern the proper corridors to take. It was slow. Spock wasn't sure his impressions were correct, and Kirk was confused by the multiple corridors. He had to squelch the ever-growing doubt that they would win their way free of the tower.



Static crackled over the communications console aboard the Enterprise, and Uhura shook her head. "I'm sorry, there's still no way to contact the captain and Mr. Spock."

"Scotty!" McCoy strode impatiently to the command chair. "We've got to find Jim and Spock."

Scotty flared. "And how would you go about it, Doctor? Strap rockets on your backside and shoot yourself down to the planet?"

"Very funny," McCoy growled. "It's been twelve hours since they beamed down!"

"I know how long it's been, and so does everyone on this ship," Scotty replied drily. "All the fumin' and fightin' is not goin' to make the ion storm disperse any faster."

"Mr. Scott," Uhura said quickly, "the transporter room reports the transporter is showing some signs of responding."

"I'm on my way," Scotty said, already heading toward the turbolift. "Mr. Sulu, you have the conn."

McCoy hurried after Scotty. "If the transporter's almost working, then we'll..."

"Doctor," Scotty interrupted, "they said it was beginnin' to respond. That just means a couple or three lights on the panel are comin' on. It *does not* mean that it's safe to use."

"But if you tried..."

Scotty gave directions to the lift, then turned a level gaze on McCoy. "If I tried to beam Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk aboard, assuming I could lock onto them, we might get them back -- in pieces, an arm here, a leg there..."

McCoy winced, acknowledging defeat. No matter -- he would wait with Scotty until Jim and Spock were brought aboard, whatever their conditions might be.

Kirk loathed the gray, endless maze and the putrid moldy smell in the air. How many hours had they been groping through twisting passages? How many...? It began again -- the crawling sensations, the unmistakable violation of his mind. No one had the right to do that. No one! He ground his teeth angrily.

"Jim!"

Spock's voice echoed in the corridor... echoed and was lost amid the brilliant red that suddenly swam in the air. Crimson covered everything, boiling and bubbling like a witch's brew.

Kirk blinked. He was on Vulcan, standing on the land of Spock's family, burning with anger. Spock lay on the sandy ground, green blood spreading across the front of his tunic. A tall Vulcan male stood proudly before T'Pau. He held a lirpa, its sharp blade stained green.

"It's not fair!" Kirk yelled. "I told you he was ill. He should never have been allowed to fight."

"Kroykah!" T'Pau ordered. "Spock was challenged, the battle fairly fought. Stonn has won the woman, T'Pring."

Kirk knelt beside Spock. He watched McCoy run his scanner over the Vulcan.

McCoy shook his head. "He's dying, Jim."

It couldn't be true! But it was.

"Captain," Spock gasped. "Do not mourn my death. I have fought the Kal-if-fee, and lost. It is an honorable way for a Vulcan to die. We all must accept death one day."

"Spock, I..." Kirk's voice broke.

"Jim," Spock whispered, "the years I served on the Enterprise under... your command were...." His eyes closed.

McCoy sighed. "He's gone."

Kirk felt as if an iron fist had struck him in his chest. Life without Spock? Impossible.

Kirk sat up, his head swimming from the sudden movement. Where was Spock? Suffering from vertigo, he peered into the gray gloom. He could hear ragged breathing punctuated with little moans.

"Spock," he croaked, his throat dry and raspy.

His first officer lay a few feet away. Spock was flinching as if something were striking him.

"Spock," Kirk whispered. "It's okay."

"No, Jim. No. No!" Spock wailed, his voice catching on what sounded like a sob.

"Spock, wake up... Now!" Kirk urged, fear edging his voice.

The Vulcan began shaking violently. Even the muscles of his face were quivering. Kirk lay his hand on Spock's forehead. It was hot and dry and...

Kirk was spinning in space, gasping for air. He wore a spacesuit but his oxygen had run out. From the corner of his eye, he could see the Tholians completing a web of energy.

The scene changed; he was in the transporter room. Spock and McCoy were there, bending over a man in a spacesuit. Kirk realized it was himself.

Too late. Spock was holding back tears. Too late. Too late....

Kirk shook himself. He still had his hand on the Vulcan's forehead. He had glimpsed what Spock was seeing. The force in the tower was making them relive events, only changing the outcome of each. Keeping his hand on Spock's face, Kirk reached out awkwardly to touch his mind again.

Spock. I'm alive. We're in the tower. Wake up!

Spock flung up an arm, nearly knocking Kirk backward. The sable eyes fluttered open, horror alive in their depths.

"Too late," he said, his voice breaking.

"No! Look at me!" Kirk shouted.

Spock sat up, staring incredulously at his captain. Not trusting his eyes, he reached to touch Kirk's arm. An expression of joy was quickly hidden as Spock dropped his face into his hands. The energy field in the maze was like quicksand, sucking at his barriers, exposing raw emotions that were biting into his very soul. He did not know how to cope. How could he bear the pain, the agony, without his Vulcan wall of protection? That wall was crumbling, and when it was gone... then what? Cold terror gripped him. Would he go insane? A raving maniac with a destroyed mind? Was that what the future held for him?

Kirk realized that Spock was on the verge of collapse. "Can I do anything to help?" he asked softly.

Spock struggled to regain control, but his voice shook alarmingly. "I... I don't know." He raised his eyes to look almost pleadingly at his captain. "Perhaps if we maintain contact -- an empathic meld only." Spock hesitated. "You would sense my thoughts, though not my actual words." Even as he said it, his Vulcan half recoiled at the mere suggestion of intimate rapport.

"It works both ways," Kirk reminded, "but, Spock, I am willing to do whatever must be done."

"Yes." Spock swallowed hard. Shyly he held out his hand and felt a strong answering grip.

"How much farther do we have to go, I wonder?" Kirk muttered as they started descending the sooty gray passages once more.

"I think perhaps we are well over halfway," Spock said.

"I'll be glad to get out of here," Kirk commented.

Spock sighed. "Indeed."

The next attack, for that was what it seemed, was not long in coming. Spock tightened his long fingers around Kirk's hand. Waves of glistening silver became waves of emotion, lapping at their legs, splashing upward to spray their faces.

Spock caught his breath. He saw his pet sehlat dying... his mother's face when he left Vulcan for the Academy... the pain of seeing Captain Pike a helpless cripple. He felt a gentle pressure on his hand, and the vision changed. Farmland in Iowa stretched before him, and an older man worked in the fields, riding a tractor. Somehow Spock knew it was Kirk's grandfather, and a melancholy such as he had never before experienced welled inside him. The smell of sweet hay... rows of pumpkins under an October moon... the taste of hot apple pie.

Spock could sense his captain's emotions. They were his as well. Shared. Kirk knew of his loneliness, and the knowing somehow made it endurable.

There were tears. Whose? Spock cringed, tried to pull back, but the firm grip on his hand was relentless. Hold on. It didn't matter about sadness, or hunger, or exhaustion. Put one foot before the other. Keep going.

Stumble became stagger, and breathing, at times, turned to sobbing. Their mutual psyche was flailed and battered, but it did not break because of a captain's compassion and a Vulcan's courage.

At long last, the silver sea retreated and a different kind of brightness took its place.

"Spock!" Kirk cried. "We made it."

Spock staggered through the doorway and would have fallen had not Kirk caught him. The rapport was still strong between them, and for a long moment, Kirk held Spock in a comforting embrace. The Vulcan's strength was gone, as was his own.

"I thank thee," Spock murmured.

Kirk gently lowered Spock to the sand and began to think of a way to survive the blazing heat. He was tired, so tired.

Five hours later, a landing party found the captain and his first officer lying beneath a small canopy made of ripped tunics. They were sleeping, their skin burned by the fierce sun, and their hands were tightly clasped.



(IL) LOGICAL

Am I really deceiving everyone
With my protestations of
logic

When he is in danger?

Certainly the crew believes me.

They have never seen inside me;

They believe I am incapable of behaving any way but
logically.

And my fellow officers: Scott, Uhura, Sulu --

They see only what I wish them to see --

The face of pure

logic.

McCoy, of course, does not believe, will not believe.

He has seen, on occasion, my masked defenses crumble;

He has seen the

illogical

Fear in my eyes.

Still, I can maintain my charade with him.

But then there is Jim himself.

At the beginning, perhaps,

I was able to make him believe

My motivations were

logical.

It did not take him long, however,

To see beyond the facade, to see the hidden

illogical

Part of me I show to no one.

He found it; he knows.

He looks at me with such

Understanding, such compassion,

(And a touch of humor).

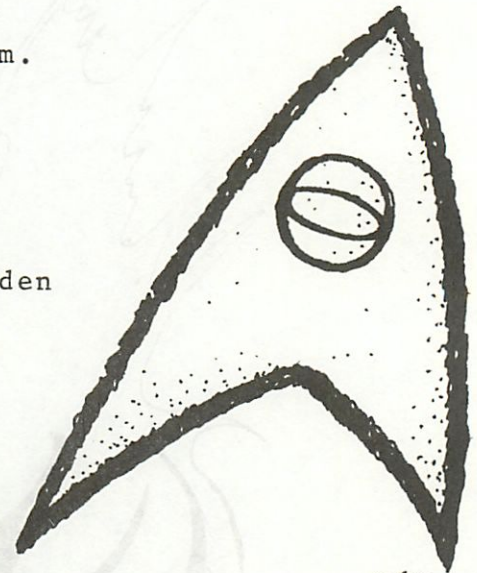
No, I can never deceive him,

And the strange

illogical

Thing, the point of it all, is that

I do not mind.



-MIKE BRAUN
78

Ellen L. Kobrin

AND THE SOUTH SHALL FALL AGAIN

*leslye lilker
juanita salicrup*

with editorial suggestions and scene inserts by: Trinetten Kern

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is a quasi-Sahaj universe story, conceived out of a minor plot flaw in *THE FORGING**. In the chapter entitled "Reunion, Rebel Style" where Sahaj meets Doctor Leonard McCoy's family for the first time, he frees Jackie Lee's canaries, and she never gets her revenge. Originally, "And the South..." was intended to be pure and simple fun, but who is to say that, given the circumstances, the events depicted within this story wouldn't or couldn't happen?

There is, however, an imperative for reading "And the South...": place tongue firmly in cheek, and enjoy...

**THE FORGING*, a novel by Leslye Lilker, is now sold out. It may be reprinted in the future. If you are interested in the reprint or other works by this author, or SASASHAR PRESS in general, please send a SASE to: SASASHAR PRESS, 61 Union Place, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

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The sunlight streaming in through the autotint glass of the windowed wall gave the morning room a sense of warmth and cheer, but for once, Amanda's favorite room in her home did not affect her mood. She sat curled up comfortably in a corner of the couch, musing over a letter she had received that morning from her youngest brother. Steven was the one member of her large family who communicated regularly; annually, at least.

It had been years since she had seen her family. There were great nieces and nephews she had never seen, and possibly never would. She wasn't getting any younger.

She sighed as she refolded the letter.

"Is something troubling you, Grandmother?"

Amanda started. She had been so engrossed in her own thoughts that she hadn't heard her grandson come in. Sahaj, looking pensive, came to stand before her, his posture formally submissive as he awaited her response. It was at times like this that he reminded her most of Spock, although she knew the inner workings of this boy better in some ways than she had of her own son.

She smiled at him and patted the couch invitingly. He sat where she had indicated, keeping a respectful distance between them.

"I'm homesick," she told him. The expected eyebrow did not arch. Instead, he nodded understanding.

"The letter...from your brother, Steven."

"Your great uncle, Steven," she corrected. This time the eyebrow rose slightly. Apparently, Sahaj hadn't considered that there were family members he hadn't met. Maybe he never would. The thought touched Amanda with regret. Sahaj should have the opportunity to meet his unknown human relatives.

"What's Steven like?"

Amanda's lips twitched with her effort not to smile at her grandson's casual question, which barely masked his curiosity. She decided to appease his appetite.

"Steven is the youngest of four children--"

"Are you the oldest?" he interrupted.

"No," she answered, amused at the implication. "I was the 'forgotten' child, the middle one."

"But how can you be the middle of four? Are you the second oldest, or second youngest?"

"I stand corrected," she said somberly, but with laughing eyes. "First born was my sister, Andrea. I came along two years later, and two years after that my brother, Benjamin, was born. But Steven was born 13 years after I was, and all three of us took turns spoiling Steve."

"Where did you live?"

"My father was an engineer and we did quite a bit of moving when I was small. I suppose the constant changes, the giving up of friends and familiarity made us an especially close family. We finally settled in the New England region of the United States when Dad retired. Did you have a chance to see that area when you visited Earth?"

"No. There wasn't enough time. And please don't change the subject."

It was Amanda's turn to raise an eyebrow. "As we grew up, we scattered. Andrea married and settled with her family on one of the Martian colonies. Ben settled in California. You know what happened to me, and Steve, at the time he wrote this letter was living in Charleston." Her eyes dropped to the short, handwritten note resting on her lap. "He sent it over a month ago, but somehow it got sidetracked to Berengaria. If it had gotten her when it was supposed to, I might have been able to attend the family reunion he's planning. Now there isn't enough time to make arrangements...." Her voice trailed off wistfully.

"Don't you ever miss Earth?"

"Do you?" she countered evenly.

He shrugged. "I'd like to go back and visit my friends again, sometime. I liked the Reverend McCoy and Mrs. Kirk."

"What about Paige?"

He was startled into a most un-Vulcan and most rewarding expression of disgust. "No, thank you!" Then he added, "But I would like to see Delilah again."

An odd look crossed Amanda's face and settled in the depths of her blue eyes. "Are you caught up in your school-work?"

He nodded, perplexed.

"Good." She rose, with determination in the graceful movement. "Go upstairs and start packing."

"Grandmother--"

She cut off his protest, shooing him to his feet. "If we hurry we can catch the evening shuttle from Space Central. Don't pack heavy clothing. It's summertime in the Western Hemisphere."

She herded him to the door, where he stopped and turned to face her. "You mean we're really going?"

"Yes, provided you'll get a move on, young man!"

"But what about Grandfather?"

That stopped her, but only for a moment. "I haven't had a vacation in years. I think it's time." She urged Sahaj into the hall.

"Vacations are illogical," he muttered.

"Do you want to stay home?"

"No."

She tapped him firmly on the shoulder and pointed at the stairway. "You've got 15 minutes, then."

"What'll you do about Grandfather?" Sahaj persisted. "Leave him a note?"

"You leave your grandfather to me," she replied sagely, having already decided on a plan to scale that hurdle. She climbed the stairs on her grandson's heels. "Hurry!" When they reached the door to the master bedroom, Sahaj shrugged philosophically and trotted down the hall to his own room.

Amanda's first step in her rapidly conceived plan was to call the house steward to advise him that the family had been called away unexpectedly, and that he should see to the running of Valjn'd'jt for the next fourteen days. Step two was packing. It only took her a moment to lay out her clothing. She was traveling lightly, and anything she'd need she'd buy while she was home.

Home. Strange how she hadn't thought of Earth that way until she had decided she was going there.

The intercom hummed in a muted tone, designed to raise the least irritation, but Amanda's reaction belayed the device's intent. She snapped the channel open with a harried, "Yes?"

"Amanda," her husband addressed her in what she recognized was his 'my wife is a lunatic, but she's human so I'll indulge her' neutral tone of voice, "I have just been informed by your grandson that you are planning an excursion."

"That is correct, my husband. What shall I pack for you?"

"I believe it would be best to discuss this matter before you set out on your journey. If you would come down to the study, please?"

"Not now, Sarek. I'm busy." Amanda pressed the off button, picturing the shocked expression on Sarek's face as he stared down at the silent intercom. Her unprecedented action was risky, but it would guarantee Sarek's arrival to the master bedroom within minutes. If she timed step three right.... Amanda coded a call to Val'der'ant.

By the time Sarek opened the bedroom door, T'Pau was replying to Amanda's request, informing her sister-in-law that familial ties were the cultural foundation of Vulcan society. It was within Amanda's right to take her family and go. Sarek could be spared from his duties to honor his obligation to Amanda's family. Closing formalities were made while Sarek radiated thunderclouds from the doorway. The connection was broken. Amanda looked up at her husband, beaming a satisfied smile in his direction.

"Well, let's go," she told him, cheerfully.

"Amanda, I am going nowhere."

She began to pack the clothing she had prepared, including what she thought Sarek would need. "All right. Then you can stay home by yourself."

"Sahaj will be with me. I shall not be alone."

"Yes, you will. Sahaj is coming with me."

"He is not."

"Please, don't start! You heard T'Pau, and I've heard you say it often enough: 'in our society, family is all'. And, in case you've forgotten, there are two sides to this family. It's time Sahaj met the other half."

"I recall the results of your grandson's last visit to Earth. I do not wish him exposed to those undermining elements again."

"It'll only be for two weeks," she told him, closing the case with a snap. "As I see it, Sarek, you have two choices: A) you can stay here while we go, or, B) you can come with us. By coming with us you'd insure your grandson's proper behavior and second..." she met his eyes, "...you'd save me from two weeks of missing you terribly."

Sarek appeared unswayed and he had closed the channel formed by their marriage bond. "I suppose you have already informed the staff of your intended absence?"

"Of our absence."

Sarek stared at her, apparently of a mind to protest further, but Amanda sensed that somehow, she had won. The thought was confirmed a moment later when he activated the intercom and coded Sahaj's room. When the boy answered, Sarek asked,

"Child, have you finished packing?"

"Yes, Grandfather," came the hesitant answer.

"Very well. We shall depart in precisely sixty seconds."

"Are you going, too, Grandfather?"

Sahaj's voice sounded eager, anxious to have the benefit of his grandfather's company, but Sarek couldn't bring himself to answer. He disconnected the call and turned back to Amanda, studying her thoughtfully for perhaps twenty long seconds. She met his gaze squarely.

"My wife," he said finally in a quiet tone, "you have neglected to pack suitable garments for my reunion with your family."

Amanda was elated, and she couldn't resist teasing. "You can get whatever you need on Earth. After all, your credit rating is fantastic."

He winced at the reminder, gave her a Vulcan glare, strode to his wardrobe, removed a second travel case, packed it and was ready to leave before the sixty seconds were up.

CHAPTER 2: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Doctor Leonard McCoy was deep into his favorite medical journal when one of the engineering lieutenants barged into the sanctum sanctorum of his office.

"Uh--Doc?"

"McCoy looked up, slightly nettled. He'd been halfway through an extremely scholarly piece on chromosome research--one addressed, in tones heavy with stiff formality and verbosity, to 'heads of medical colleges, directors of research and select physicians of note across the galaxy'. He'd snorted at the salutation, then had groaned over the heavy language, long since unused except by congenial social snobs, and finally had settled into the piece. It had turned out to be interesting in spite of the adventures in archaic translation that reading it proved to be. Then he'd been interrupted by that young smart-ass from engineering--Putnam, he remembered.

"Don't you believe in knocking?" the medic snapped testily.

"Oh...sorry, Doctor," Putnam drawled, sounding unrepentant. "It's just that I thought you'd want to see this as soon as possible." He held up a stargram in a red priority pouch.

McCoy's eyes widened. "Is that for me?"

"Yep. The communications chief down on Starbase 11 gave it to me. I guess I was the first Enterprise crewman he spotted. It just came in."

McCoy took the pouch from the lieutenant. "Uh - thanks, Putnam," he said, suddenly subdued. He turned the 'gram over and over in his hands. Putnam departed, leaving the doctor to his ruminations.

There was no point in delaying, McCoy told himself with traditional unease. He passed the seamed edging of the outer covering under the analyzer lens of the communications outlet and the pouch snapped open. The small strip of coiled tape within fell into his palm. With a shrug, he fed it into its proper slot and watched as the symbols were printed out on the intercom's visual read-out screen.

He watched the salutatory indices and codes fly by and then was frozen to his chair by the brief message that flashed across the screen.

Dear Brother -- You must come home immediately! Father has entered his last illness and even now is dying! -- Your loving sister, Jacqueline Lee.

With a muffled curse, he reversed the tape, reflecting that only Jackie Lee would have wasted so many side words on drama and left out the facts. As he reread the stargram at a slower pace, the impact of the words hit him. He snapped off the reader and removed the tape, immersed in a sea of pain and regret. His father -- dying! Despite the cantankerous nature of the Reverend Doctor Alan McCoy, there was a great deal of love between him and his star-faring son. *He's been ill so long, McCoy reflected, that we almost forgot he was slowly deteriorating...and there never was much time to spend together....*

He looked at the tape strip in his hand and then closed his fist around it decisively. With a sharp nod, he rose and strode out of his office.

Kirk contemplated the chessboard before him with a bullish expression. Every apparent way out of his present predicament would clearly lead to swift disaster, for though his Vulcan opponent had fewer pieces on the board, they were currently poised in devastatingly threatening positions.

He favored Spock with a scowl. "Really set me up this time, didn't you?"

"Sir?" Spock inquired.

"Never mind that, Mister. I've known you too many years to believe you're as naive as you sometimes pretend."

Two eyebrows elevated predictably. Kirk just scowled more deeply and went back to studying the board. There had to be a way out!

Just as he spotted the one possible weakness in the ring of hostile pieces, the doorbuzzer to his quarters sounded. Kirk said, "Come," and McCoy plunged into the room with unaccustomed haste.

"Jim, I need emergency leave right away," the doctor announced, eyes still on the strip of tape in his hand. "We aren't doing much at present but cooling our heels and I think you can spare me. I'll get M'Benga to --"

"Hold it! Hold it!" Kirk held up a hand to stop the torrent, a half grin lighting his features. It was so unlike Bones to behave like an antsy academy plebe that Kirk misread the import of the doctor's initial request.

"Huh?" McCoy looked at the captain, really seeing him for the first time...and then he noticed Spock seated across the desk. "Oh." He gulped. "I didn't know you weren't alone." He bit his lip, embarrassed at the lack of control he'd shown in front of the first officer.

Spock stiffened almost imperceptibly. "I can absent myself, Doctor, if that is your wish."

McCoy flushed, embarrassed still further. "No. No, Spock...I'm...I'm sorry. I just didn't know you were here, I was so preoccupied. Stay."

Spock nodded slightly, signalling his acceptance of the situation, and sat back in his chair, arms crossed across his chest.

Kirk frowned, the chessmatch and banter forgotten. He viewed the physician's stormy blue eyes and troubled expression with an internal twist of alarm.

"What's wrong, Bones?" he asked gently.

The doctor chewed his lower lip, trying to control the seething emotions aroused by the brutally short tape.

"I...I just got a stargram," he said, looking from one friend to the other. There was open concern on Jim Kirk's face and a compassionate expressionlessness on Spock's. The impassivity, ironically, helped more than the concern. McCoy felt himself relax a little. "One of the engineering techs was down on Eleven when it came through and the comm chief saw him and gave the tape to him to deliver. It was...top priority, personal." He swallowed with some difficulty, his eyes riveted on Kirk's. "My father is dying, Jim. The stargram is from my sister, Jackie Lee. I-- I'd like to go home, right away."

"I'm sorry, Bones, really."

"I have the time coming," the doctor protested.

Kirk shook his head. "I wasn't denying you leave, Bones. I'd never do that unless I absolutely had to. I was trying to express my sympathy."

"Oh. Oh, I'm sorry. I guess this hit me harder than I thought." He looked back at the cryptic tapestrip.

Kirk and Spock exchanged a communicative glance. They had never seen McCoy this distraught before and it worried them both. Kirk cleared his throat.

"Bones...of course you may have your leave. We aren't exactly jumping with activity around here and I'm sure we can get along. I'll see to it that transportation connections are arranged for you. How soon do you want to leave?"

"Immediately, if you don't mind, Jim. This message is pretty fresh, but it sounds awfully urgent. I'd like to be there before...."

"I understand. We'll do everything to see to it that you will be."

"Thanks, Jim," McCoy said huskily. He turned toward the door. Spock looked a questioning frown at Kirk, then at the doctor's sloping shoulders.

"Doctor?"

McCoy turned, regarding Spock with surprise. "Yes?"

"Sir, I should like to express my regrets and the sympathy of the occasion to you...and your family."

McCoy was nonplussed, but not feeling much like even that expression of surprise, said simply and sincerely, "Thanks, Spock. Thanks very much." He wondered if the day would ever arrive when he'd cease being astonished by the things Spock said or did.

"And I should like to offer whatever assistance you might require over this difficult time -- whether here, aboard ship...or on your journey home."

"Why...uh..." McCoy was totally taken by storm. He stared, uncomprehending, at the Vulcan.

"I think that's an excellent idea," seconded Kirk. He eyed McCoy with concern. "Spock, I'd like you to accompany the doctor. You may represent me and the crew in an official capacity and provide any help Bones can use during the

next several days."

"Jim, that's not necessary," McCoy protested automatically. But then he thought about it a moment. He really could use Spock's steadying influence during this crisis, and Jim would be disappointed if he didn't accept Spock's offer. "All right," he relented. "Thanks...I could use...the...support."

The captain and first officer rose from their abandoned chessmatch.

"How long will you need?" asked Kirk.

McCoy's expression went shadowy with masked sorrow. "I don't know exactly, but I wouldn't guess it'll take more than a few days."

"How about ten days, then? If you need more time, just have Spock send word."

The doctor nodded. "Thanks very much, again." He looked at the stoic Vulcan. "And thank you, too, Spock -- very much."

Spock nodded and McCoy departed. The captain's hand on Spock's arm stopped him from following. He met the captain's gaze.

"Keep a close eye on him, Spock. He doesn't look quite right to me."

"I shall do so, Jim. But I expect the doctor's confusion will pass. It is, I should imagine, the result of the initial shock. I believe that the doctor and his father were quite close."

Kirk nodded and offered his friend a small, speculative smile. "It's a wonder Starfleet Command hasn't caught on to you yet."

"Captain?"

"You're almost as good a human psychologist as Bones, and a helluva lot better one than me." When Spock sniffed, a minute, disdainful denial, Kirk grinned and squeezed Spock's arm. "Go on -- get going."

The Vulcan nodded and left the cabin.

CHAPTER 3: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE WORST KIND

Laurel Hollow was every bit as grand as Sahaj had described it. Had Spock been permitted time, he would have paused on the veranda to observe the splendor of the land in the last fading light of the Georgian day, but, as he was given only an instant to survey his surroundings before Doctor McCoy threw open the front door, Spock stored his glimpse of green fields and distant mountain peaks for future investigation. He followed McCoy through the doorway.

The entrance hall was wide, decorated tastefully with crystal and rich dark woods, with rooms branching off from the hall on either side. Spock closed the door behind him, turned, and his eyes fastened on an intriguing object.

Suspended in what he supposed was an anti-grav field, in the deep well above a curve in the majestic stairway, was a long, cylindrical, screened cage housing perhaps a dozen small birds Spock tentatively identified as canaries. They were of unusual hues, he decided, recalling descriptions he had read of the species, for although they retained the predominant yellow feathering, the shade varied on each bird from a pale almost-white to the deepest gold, with tints of blue, or green, or pink forming jagged lines across the wings. They had probably been bred in captivity, their genetic lines carefully chosen to produce the odd coloration. The birds seemed content enough in their large cage, but, looking at them, Spock felt a small twinge of regret that these creatures would never know the freedom of flight, soaring high above the land, unfettered, unbound --

"Where is hell is everybody?!" McCoy muttered as he began his ascent of the stairs, taking them two at a time in his anxiety to see his moribund father. Spock hesitated, uncertain whether or not to accompany his friend. Perhaps McCoy would wish to see his father alone. Spock had almost decided to wait where he was, unless specifically invited to attend, when Doctor McCoy's head snapped up and he came to an abrupt stop on the sixth step. He turned slowly, a look of astonishment and confusion playing over his rugged face. Spock, curious about the cause of such a reaction, stepped further down the hall. They both arrived at the wide portico of the living room entrance at the same moment.

It would have been impossible to determine which of the two was more astounded by what each viewed from his particular line of sight. Doctor McCoy saw only his father, the Reverend Alan McCoy, sitting comfortably in a strato-lounge, looking a bit frailer than he had at last visit, but with good color. He was laughing heartily. An ebony cane rested against the lounge, the only symptom of a degenerating disease.

In that same second, Spock saw what McCoy did not: his own parents. Sarek was looking uncomfortable on the only straight-backed chair in the room, and Amanda, seated in the middle of a blue velvet couch, was smiling restrainedly. Both Starfleet officers spoke simultaneously.

"Dad --!"

"Father."

Five pairs of eyebrows rose as one and the conversation in the living room stopped. Eyes met, those of the fathers questioning. Sarek was the first to recover. He rose with a gracefulness that Spock still envied and faced his son, nodding slightly to acknowledge Spock's presence.

"Explain," Sarek ordered, tone devoid of expression.

Spock adopted the ritual posture of respect. "Specify."

"What the hell are you doin' here??!!"

Leonard McCoy fielded the reverend's question, stepping rapidly into the room. "I might ask you the same question. You're supposed to be dyin'!"

"Dyin'?" Alan McCoy snorted. "Where'd you get such a damn fool notion, son?"

"Jackie Lee --"

"Hrumph! Fool woman! Thought you'd know better than to believe anything she tells you! God's beard, Leonard, you've been taken!"

"She said you had another attack --"

"I can imagine what she told you! Go on, boy, look at me. Aren't I the healthiest looking cadaver you've ever seen?"

Obviously, Alan McCoy was not telling the entire truth. While he was hardly at death's door, he was suffering. The fingers of his left hand had subluxated badly and every move was painfully slow, but there were a number of years left to the crochety, retired minister. As that last fact finally penetrated Leonard McCoy's mind, he smiled a little, relieved. He looked to his father's guests, but whatever he had been about to say stuck in his throat at the measuring look Sarek had leveled at Spock.

"You chose to accompany the doctor?" the ambassador asked. Spock nodded. "Most commendable," Sarek added.

"I am honored."

"Now, that's what I like to see: a little respect for one's father! You could learn a thing or two from your friend, Leonard. Spock -- it is, 'Spock', isn't it? -- why haven't you taught this boy of mine some manners?"

"I have attempted to do precisely that, sir, on numerous occasions; however, the subject is an unwilling pupil." Spock turned his attention back to his parents without waiting for either of the McCoy's reaction to the barb. There was one member of Spock's family missing...and, suspiciously so. There was the possibility that this 'reunion' had been engineered by one small, scheming Vulcan child. "Where is Sahaj?"

"He's gone to visit his horse," Amanda answered. She looked delighted by Spock's unexpected arrival. "How long can you stay?"

"Doctor McCoy and I were granted ten days' leave."

"It is apparent that Starfleet officials are rather liberal in granting their officers shore leave." Sarek's dry remark was translated mentally as 'Don't you ever work?'. Spock chose neither to answer nor to ask why his family was at Laurel Hollow. He decided to wait until he had fully absorbed the shock.

"Well, don't just stand there," the reverend barked. "Sit down, both of you."

The officers complied. A tense silence fell over the room.

"Hrumph!" Alan McCoy cleared his throat noisily. "Certainly was hot today. Must have been 101° in the shade."

"On Vulcan," Sarek replied in his most didactic tone, "the temperature does not drop to 101° except on the coldest of winter days."

That effectively squelched that subject of conversation. Spock studied the far wall intently.

"More tea, Amanda?" It was a rhetorical question: the reverend was already refilling Amanda's glass from an iced pitcher. A door located somewhere in the rear of the house slammed open and closed. There was the sound of hurrying feet against the floor and a familiar young voice shouted:

"Reverend! Reverend!"

Spock squirmed mentally, embarrassed by his son's overt emotionalism. One look at Sarek compounded the problem; the patriarch's brows had knitted together in a frown.

"In here, son," the senior McCoy called back.

"Paige is at boarding school," Sahaj yelled, nearing, "but her mother said I could bring Delilah here for a while. I put her in the barn. Is that all right?"

Sahaj rounded the corner and skidded to an abrupt halt, his eyes wide with astonishment as he beheld the scene. Emotion drained from his features.

A million excited questions were reflected in his eyes, but with Sarek there, glaring across the room at him, Sahaj settled for nervous disorientation.

"Father...! Hi...Uncle Len...what are you doing here?" He went to Spock for the ritual hand-touching embrace.

"I have yet to formulate an answer to that question myself," Spock told him in a low tone, for Sahaj's benefit

only. He touched fingertips to the boy's, sending a firm telepathic warning for good behavior, but uncertain of whether Sahaj had received it.

"Oh. I'm...pleased...that you are here, Father. How long can you stay? Is the Enterprise here? Wait until you see the orchards and the town and --"

"Whoa! Slow down there, son, and give your daddy a chance to breathe," the reverend ordered. "Suppose you go out to the kitchen and get glasses for your daddy and your Uncle Len. They must be right thirsty and this iced tea is mighty refreshing. Time enough for guided tours later."

"Yes, sir," Sahaj agreed, avoiding Sarek's unwavering gaze. He turned for the doorway.

"Boy," the reverend said in a sterner tone. "I don't want you running through the house." Sarek shot him a look laced with surprise. Apparently, it was the first logical thing he had heard since their arrival, for he relaxed infinitesimally.

"I won't," Sahaj promised as he left.

Explanations were made on both sides while Sahaj was gone. Spock was invited to join his family for the reunion, but he delayed an answer. Logically, he preferred staying with the McCoy's over the Graysons as the lesser of two evils, but, despite the leave time he had been granted, a thought began to gnaw at him: since there was no reason for the leave to continue, he should return to the Enterprise. He decided to postpone a decision until he had visited with his family, and turned his attention to the conversation going on around him.

Sahaj had just gone into the hall when the front door burst open. To his keen dismay, Doctor McCoy's elder sister swept into the house as though she had just reached the safety of a fort after having been chased ten miles by marauding Klingons. His first thought was for escape, but she had come upon him too fast.

Jackie Lee leaned back against the door she had just closed and shut her eyes. She blew upward to lift wisps of her wavy black hair off her forehead as she fanned herself furiously with her hand and sighed dramatically. Apparently, she was unaware of her guests.

"Ah declare, Daddy, this has been the hottest day ever! Ah am so hot, and so tired and so dusty that Ah think Ah'm goin' to faint! Yes, sir, just faint right here in this very doorway!"

Sahaj backed away, hoping that Jackie Lee would lose consciousness before he was seen, but his movement attracted the fair-skinned woman's attention. Her eyes opened, wide.

"You!! Again?! Where is that no-good, double-crossing brother of mine?! Ah'll kill him! How long are you going to be here, this time, you little vermin?! Do you see that canary cage? Do you??"

"Y-yes, ma'am."

"Do you know why that cage is up there?"

"No, ma'am."

"It's there because of you! Why the idea!! Setting my poor little defenseless birds free. Just on the off chance that Leonard would be fool enough to bring you back here, Ah had that cage suspended high enough so that you couldn't get near them. And if Ah catch you tryin' anything again Ah'll break your little green fingers!"

"I won't, Miss Jacqueline. I'll stay out of your way." Sahaj glanced over his shoulder, hoping for salvation. He found Doctor McCoy standing in the doorway, leaning against the wall, taking in the scene.

"Why, ma dear sister," the doctor drawled in what Sahaj thought was a sarcastic imitation of Jackie Lee's speech pattern. "So nice to see you, m'dear. So nice of you to pull me off my ship for a nonexistent medical emergency. However," he advanced ominously, "one can be arranged."

"Oh, Leonard," she huffed, "when Ah sent that message there was an emergency! Of course, you wouldn't be expected to care -- off galavanting around the stars, leaving me with the responsibility of a sick old man."

"Don't you call me a 'sick old man'!" roared Alan McCoy from the living room. He pounded his cane on the floor for emphasis.

"Now you see what you've done," she hissed at her brother. "You got him all excited over nothing. Now, Daddy," she called sweetly, "just calm down and Ah'll get you something nice and cold to drink."

"Don't you mollycoddle me, you witch!"

"Why, Daddy, Ah'm just concerned about your health."

"Concerned, my ass! Er...ma rabbit's hind foot!"

Sahaj couldn't help it. He snickered. Jackie Lee turned on him.

"And just what is that supposed to mean? If you think Ah'm goin' to sit still for a repetition of all your freakish, alien antics --"

"Jackie!" Leonard McCoy protested with a scandalized glance over his shoulder. He was ignored.

"-- you're dead wrong!"

"I certainly will stay out of your way, ma'am." Glasses, Sahaj reminded himself. Anything to get out of there! He turned toward the kitchen. A set of claws sunk into his shoulder and yanked him around.

"Don't you dare turn your back on me!"

"Jackie, leave the boy be!"

"Mind your business, Leonard. Ah'm not through with him yet!"

"Madam, you will remove your hand from that child at once."

Jackie Lee froze at the deep, cold voice of authority, and turned to face a thoroughly intimidating figure: tall, lean, lithe, radiating power and threat, standing over her. And behind him, sharing the doorway with her father, was a slightly taller version of the alien. She was speechless, gaping like a fish out of water.

"Sahaj, are you injured?" Spock asked while holding Jackie Lee's eyes with his own.

"I'm all right." Sahaj eased out from under Jackie's hold.

"I believe you were asked to retrieve some glasses?"

It was a dismissal that Sahaj obeyed with heartfelt relief.

Sarek felt a light touch on his sleeve; Amanda was standing at his elbow. "Did you come to help Spock...? Or hold him back?" she whispered.

"That remains to be seen." They turned their attention back to the fray. Jackie Lee closed her mouth with an audible snap.

"Ah said Ah wasn't finished with him," she insisted, blue eyes gone grey with anger. "He's supposed to have respect for his elders."

"Madam, I have taught my son to be respectful of those adults who earn respect. And, in point of fact, you are quite finished, Miss McCoy. I, however, am not."

"Spock --"

He responded to the warning with a slight nod to Sarek, but Spock didn't back down from Jackie Lee.

"Don't stop him, Sarek! I want to hear this!" Alan McCoy stomped into the hall, accompanied by the whomp-clunk of a lame leg and his cane.

"Well!" Leonard McCoy said gleefully, rubbing his hands together, his face split by a wide grin. He took Jackie by the elbow and jerked her forward. "Now that we're all together, it is my great pleasure to present Ambassador Sarek of Vulcan; his wife, the lady Amanda; and their son, and my superior officer, Commander Spock, who happens to be, in case you haven't figured this out yet, Jackie, dear, Sahaj's father. And, for the duration of my leave, they will all be our houseguests."

"Charmed, Ah'm sure," Jackie said through clenched teeth. "Ah'm leaving," she added in an undertone for her brother's benefit. He tightened his grip on her arm.

"Not on your life."

"Thank you for the invitation, Doctor McCoy," Sarek told him, "however, we could not impose."

"We'd be delighted to stay. Thank you so much."

Sarek shot his wife a twelve-pound look. She batted her eyelashes at him.

"Steven doesn't live that far away. It would be so convenient. We'll have a chance to visit with Spock, and Sahaj can see his old friends."

Spock's eyebrows darted toward his hairline, almost matching the heights of Sarek's own brows. Even Sahaj, who had stuck his head into the hall to see if the coast was clear, thought his grandmother had taken leave of her senses. But, he admitted a moment later, he had to give his grandmother credit. Sarek wouldn't argue the point in public, and it looked like they'd be staying after all. Sahaj didn't mind that at all.

"It's all settled then," the reverend announced. "I'll have Leonard arrange to bring in all your luggage later. Jackie, dear, would you kindly show our guests upstairs? I'm sure they'll want to freshen up for supper."

"Daddy --" Jackie's eyes rolled in frantic protest.

"Why, Jackie, you know how bad my legs ache at this time of night, damp as it is. Ah'd do it myself, but Ah cain't possible make those stairs."

The reverend told a convincing story; his son made a solitious move toward him, but Alan shot him his 'can it, sonny' glare. He knew exactly what he was doing.

Jackie's back straightened and she forced a stiff-lipped smile. "Certainly, Daddy. This way, please." She didn't wait to see if Sarek and Amanda would follow, holding the vaguest hope that if she ignored them, they would go away.

And then she remembered certain interstellar news items that had mentioned an Ambassador Sarek of Vulcan...the Sarek of Vulcan! An ambassador as a house guest, whatever his race, was simply not to be sneezed at. She'd be the envy of Atlanta!

She stopped on the fourth step and turned back to give Sarek a smile that would have melted an iceberg. "There is a small suite available. I do hope that you will find it comfortable." And as for that kid, she added silently, he can sleep in the stable, for all I care.

"I'm sure that will be most satisfactory, Miss McCoy."

Sooty eyelashes were fluttered at the Vulcan ambassador, whose composure had remained unruffled through the exchange. Sarek spared a glance for his wife, saw that Amanda was fighting an impulse to burst out laughing, and sighed silently. Humans!

Sahaj came out of hiding, placing the now extraneous glasses on the hall table. "I'll show you your room, Father." Then, to Leonard and Alan McCoy both: "Can Father have the blue room?"

"Sahaj," Spock admonished. "Such a request is not proper."

"Aw, that's all right," Alan McCoy interceded. "He's almost like one of the family. The boy knows the house. Always had a fondness for the blue room, as I recall; said he'd like for you to see it. 'Course it's all right."

Spock regarded the elderly gentleman thoughtfully. Sahaj's previous descriptions had not been exaggerations after all. "It was not our intention to descend upon your home all at once, sir. Are you certain that my family and I will not inconvenience you with our presence?"

"Hrumph! It's a big old house; plenty'a room, and no trouble. 'Bout time we had some guests stayin'. Last fun I had was when that boy of yours was here before."

Spock nodded respectfully. "So I have heard. I am looking forward to my stay. Sahaj --? If you will excuse us, Doctor McCoy, Reverend, Sahaj has promised me a tour of the immediate grounds."

"It's almost dark," Doctor McCoy reminded. Spock lifted one eyebrow and guided Sahaj to the door.

"You forget, Doctor, that Vulcans have perfect night vision."

Left alone in the hallway, the two McCoy men faced each other, grinning. Overhead, the canaries shrilled their continual songs.

Leonard slapped his father's shoulder affectionately. "So, how ya doin', Dad?"

"I think Ah could use a drink."

"Great idea. Me, too."

The late Georgian dusk was passing rapidly into sultry night, and out beyond the veranda roof and above the willows, oaks and sycamore trees, stars were twinkling into existence in Earth's deep blue-black heavens. There was a three-quarter moon just cresting the distant rolling hills, and the air was alive with the chirruping of a multitude of crickets and other Terran insect life. It was Sahaj's first summer night on Earth, too, and he was stunned at the beauty of it; the richness of sight, sound and scent -- the damp, sweet odor of fresh-mown grass and honeysuckle, jasmine and countless unnamed blossoms.

Opening his keen senses, the boy paused on the porch to collect it all; then the screendoor thudded shut and he felt a warm touch on his shoulder. He turned to face his father, and his night vision clearly registered the affectionate smile behind Spock's faintly glowing eyes. Somehow, Sahaj was slightly embarrassed at that moment, and glad for the solitude of the night and miles of land, and solid walls. And maybe they had been too long apart, but suddenly Sahaj didn't know what to say.

Spock looked him over, trying to assimilate the changes in his son; the shorter hair, the thinner face, the taller frame, the control he could read in brown eyes he'd remembered as more wildly chaotic and emotional. He said simply, "You have grown, my son," hoping that the twinge of disappointment he experienced was effectively cloaked in the pride he wished to convey.

I confess some surprise at seeing you here," he added.

"Me, too. Is everything all right?"

So Sahaj had guessed, or reasoned, a purpose to his presence. "You are very perceptive, Sahaj. Doctor McCoy received word from his sister that their father was critically ill. It appears that her diagnosis was premature." Sahaj's face brightened, but he didn't smile. "Shall we proceed with the tour?"

"I really could show you everything better in the morning," Sahaj offered hopefully. Spock nodded.

"Quite logical. I perceived that the doctor required some time along with Reverend McCoy and could only excuse us in that manner."

"Oh," Sahaj replied pensively.

"And while your grandparents get settled, you and I will have time to talk. Is it permissible to walk the grounds of this residence after nightfall?"

"Sure. Come on. Do you want to see my horse? I rode her over from...a friend's house."

Sahaj trotted down the steps of the veranda and waited for his father to gain his side. "Paige?" Spock asked blithely.

"Yeah," the boy admitted, then neatly turned the topic away from the young lady in question. "Doctor McCoy is an equestrian. He taught me to ride, but I'm not very good at it yet. Maybe, if you ask him, he'll teach you."

"Hmmm," Spock offered, noncommittally. "I shall give the subject the consideration it merits." They strode on in silence for a few moments, then Spock changed the subject. "Before we return to the house for the evening meal there is a subject I shall need clarified."

"Specify," Sahaj said with sudden formality. His neutral expression withstood his father's sharp glance and exasperated frown.

"A review of your previous relationship with each of the McCoy's, your evaluation of personalities and impending clashes in ideologies I may be unaware of at present, but may be able to avoid forewarned, and an explanation of that incident in the front hall with Miss McCoy."

Sahaj had swung open the barn door and was fumbling with the light panel. Delilah nickered a soft welcome. "What kind of explanation?"

"I want to know, in detail, what you did to arouse such fury in the woman that would not be forgotten in all this time."

Sahaj gulped. "It doesn't take much to make her angry!"

"Nevertheless, I would appreciate a report from you. If I am to defend you, Sahaj, I must know the extent of your previous crimes and that you do not intend repeating them."

"I won't, Father. After all, I was just a child then."

"I see." There was a touch of amusement around the corners of Spock's mouth.

"Don't you want to see Delilah?" Sahaj offered.

"Yes, and while we are viewing this animal you speak of so highly, you may give me your explanation."

"Oh...All right." Sahaj started for his horse's stall, but turned, reconsidering. "Father, do we have a statue of limitations on past crimes?"

Spock steeled himself for the report. It appeared that it was going to be much worse than he expected. He shook his head, no. "However, you will tell me, despite that."

Sahaj sighed deeply. He went into Delilah's stall, and backed out the mare, keeping her safely between himself and his father. "Well, there was this fair and...."

The veranda drew him, like the observation deck of the Enterprise, late at night. Perhaps it was attributable to his childhood, to the long nights -- many and often -- spent gazing up at a starfield from wide open plains, but when there were complicated matters of interaction to be worked out, he still sought a canopy of stars under which to think. It seemed to matter not at all if they were the stars of 40 Eridani, or of Sagittarius, or of any far-flung galactic reach; the effect was the same: wonderfully calming.

It was a pleasant gray-silver-green summer's night under the moonlight, another of Earth's more attractive features, and Spock watched the shadows slowly slide across the lawn, enjoying the coolness of what humans would have called a 'hot, moist, Southern night'. He found the atmosphere of planetside exhilarating, and while it was late, he was wide awake when a presence made itself known beside him. Without looking, he sighed and acknowledged his companion.

"Doctor."

"Whatcha doin' out here at this hour, Spock?" McCoy asked as he crossed the short distance between them.

"One might ask you the same question."

"Don't feel much like sleeping, though I guess the last few days, what with the worry and all, I wore myself out pretty well. Guess it's bein' home."

Spock nodded. "In a sense, this is a great deal like being home for me as well."

"It certainly turned out that way, didn't it?" The doctor grinned amiably. "Some surprise. Glad you came?"

"My reason for coming was entirely removed from this situation."

"And I do appreciate it, but it's a helluva lot better this way."

"Agreed. I, too, was pleased to find your father well."

"Oh, he's not well -- that damned arthritis -- but he's not at death's door, either. He's really enjoying having all of you here. I am, too. I've asked you home before; I'm glad you finally made it. I think you'll find a lot to admire in Southern hospitality and traditions."

"There is much worth admiration in most cultures. Unfortunately, I will not have ample time to observe your 'Southern' customs. The scout ship Sacajawea departs Earth the day after tomorrow for the Enterprise's present sector."

McCoy stared at the Vulcan with stunned surprise. "You aren't leaving?! We have ten days!"

"We were granted ten days emergency leave. The 'emergency' does not exist. You may stay if you choose, Doctor, but I must return to the ship and inform Captain Kirk of the change in your family situation."

"I'll send him a stargram," McCoy volunteered.

"My purpose here was to represent the crew of the Enterprise and to render assistance as required in a crisis situation. The crisis does not exist; my duty has been discharged. Logically, I must --"

"You think there's no crisis?" the doctor interrupted. "You came to assist me in handling a crisis, Spock, and you're not walkin' out and leavin' me with this." McCoy saw the eyebrow dart upward, as expected, and continued. "Who's gonna keep my father and yours from massive coronaries when they get into more political arguments like the one at the dinner table tonight? They're working up to a grand scale war. And who's gonna protect Sahaj from Jackie Lee?"

"It seems to me that you are eminently qualified to handle both situations, Doctor," Spock told him, emphasizing the final word as if it, in itself, contained the sum and substance of his reasoning.

"The hell I am, Spock, and you know it."

"Sarek and Sahaj are both capable of handling themselves in such situations, if you can keep your family members relatively in check."

The doctor wasn't sure that he wasn't being teased, but just in case Spock still was entertaining any notions of an early departure, he played his ace.

"Look, Spock, if not for me and my peace of mind, give your son a break." The Vulcan turned his head to stare directly at the human. "You haven't seen him in what?...close to a year now. I saw how you looked at him at dinner; like you didn't know him, and were confused about what was going on inside his head. He's changed. He's grown up fast, Spock. If I were you I wouldn't pass up any opportunity to spend some time with the boy. Before you know it, he'll be grown. Besides, if you pack up on the first available scout and leave, you'll break his heart, not to mention your mother's, who happens to be looking forward to spending a few days with her whole family. Who will Sarek talk to? For that matter, who'll I talk to? Dammit, Spock, it just isn't fair to let me stick here as mediator between our respective families. You can't leave, and that's all there is to it." Spock calmly looked back out across the fields.

There followed a long silence during which the doctor waited for an answer that didn't come. Finally he decided to change the subject, and his angle of approach, and maybe dazzle the Vulcan with some diversionary tactics.

"I guess they're all asleep by now," he said, leaning against one of the huge white columns and nodding toward the house. "Dad plum wore himself out debating with Sarek; the excitement's more than he's used to. Jackie Lee swears the heat's gotten to her, poor wilted blossom that she pretends to be, and that trip from Vulcan's trying if you're not used to warping around space like we are. It'll take your parents a day or two to get over their space-lag."

"As Sahaj has plans for me shortly after dawn, perhaps I should also retire."

"Yeah. He told me. He's going to give you a riding lesson." McCoy chuckled. "You should have told him."

"The child did not give me the opportunity. However, he has come to a false conclusion based on an unsubstantiated supposition, and an object lesson seems in order. In any case, we go riding before breakfast. Would you care to join us?"

McCoy shook his head and yawned. "Nope. I'm sleeping in. I'll leave this one to you two. Maybe another time before we go."

"Apparently you are also prone to unsubstantiated assumptions, Doctor. I have not agreed to stay beyond tomorrow."

"Spock..." the doctor's voice held tones of warning. "Jim doesn't need you there. I need you -- Sahaj needs you -- here. I'll square it with the captain when we get back, but I'd like you to stay. Call it a personal favor. Call it any damned thing you like...including a medical order, if necessary," he drawled smoothly, avoiding Spock's eyes by staring into the night sky.

"Your medical authority over me pertains to the Enterprise only, Doctor. I refuse to recognize it here."

"We're not talking authority; we're talking necessity. In my professional opinion, as your physician, I'd say you need at least ten days of rest and relaxation under Georgian sunshine. Why, leaving Laurel Hollow might even be detrimental to your health."

Anticipating Spock's question, McCoy's blue eyes darted to his and cut him off. The doctor was struggling to contain his mirth. "Set one foot off my property and we'll have a medical emergency to report after all, if you receive my meaning, Spock."

The Vulcan's shoulders lifted with a resigned sigh. He could have argued the matter further, but he had lost interest in pursuing a point that had already been rendered academic by his decision to take the ten day leave they'd been granted regardless of the circumstances.

"I had no idea that your 'Southern Hospitality' involved holding your 'guests' hostage under threat of bodily harm, Doctor McCoy," he said mildly.

"Who's threatening?"

"Good night, Doctor. I have an early call." He headed for the door.

"Sleep well. You'd better be rested if you don't want that boy of yours to find out just how 'old' the Old Man is getting. He'll ride circles around you."

Spock paused at the door. "If you taught him the equestrian arts, Doctor, I need not fear that."

"Anytime you can outride me --"

"Any time is a most appropriate choice of terms."

"We'll have to see about that.... Oh, Spock...in the morning, if Sahaj offers to saddle up a mount for you, don't let him put you on the big chestnut gelding. There's not a meaner creature on the face of this green earth. He's a kinda joke around these parts. Just thought I'd warn ya."

The Vulcan nodded his thanks. "I stand warned, Doctor McCoy. Good night."

With the almost inaudible thud of the screen door, McCoy was alone with the vibrantly alive night. He breathed deeply, filling his lungs with sweet Georgia air and letting himself feel a deep appreciation of the land. Maybe he'd forgotten just how much he missed the big house, or maybe because, quite unexpectedly, everything was right in his world -- a world he had expected to find shattered with loss only hours ago -- but suddenly the doctor felt insufferably pleased with the situation and himself. As far as he knew, Spock had never come home with the captain for any length of time.

As he stretched out on the porch swing, one arm crooked under his head to pillow it, and one foot still on the ground to push with, he considered taking Spock over to meet and visit with Jim's mother, Margaret, and Peter, his nephew.

Mentally, he scratched the last. Peter was away on his pre-academy training camp. Time sure flew. Well, he'd have to drop in on Mrs. Kirk, then, anyway...maybe take Spock...definitely take Sahaj. And for the rest of his leave he intended nothing more than sitting back and watching what this interesting mixture of personalities would produce in the way of entertainment...and maybe he'd even challenge Spock to a little horse race; show that self-assured Vulcan who was the superior horseman...if he decided to drag himself off the porch swing long enough.

CHAPTER 4: INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Jackie Lee McCoy prowled the rooms of Laurel Hollow with a questing vengeance. Where was that man? She'd found herself noting the attractive Vulcan ambassador more and more as the days had gone by. The quiet, regal dignity, deep, compelling voice and magnetic onyx eyes combined with that air of leashed power, all served to pique her curiosity. Despite, or perhaps because of, Sarek's pure alienness, he was enormously attractive to her, although she had some difficulty trying to decide whether he, or Spock, made the better catch of the two. She'd finally rationalized that Sarek's greater maturity and the fact that he had already spent a great many years pleasing a human woman, put the greater weight on his side of the scale. True, Spock was more available, but he came attached to one miserable child, and, on consideration, she couldn't help thinking she'd rather die than end up as surrogate mother to that little monster of his.

Jackie Lee's standards of behavior where men and marriage were concerned had helped blind her to the true nature of Sarek and Amanda's relationship, and, also toward Amanda herself. In fact, after a sniffing dismissal of Amanda's quiet gentility as lacking in sufficient spirit, she ignored the ambassador's lady altogether. Had she not been so obtuse she would have seen the sparkle of amusement in Amanda's blue eyes as she beheld Jackie Lee's calculating pursuit of her husband -- and Sarek's casually evasive actions.

Having searched fruitlessly through the house for the Vulcan, Jackie Lee stepped out onto the porch. Bright Southern moonlight silverplated the lawn and fields, throwing the wide veranda into deep shadow, but by the same dim light, she espied her quarry, sitting motionless on the porch swing. She assayed an attitude of nonchalance, pretending she hadn't noticed him, and strolled to the railing where she struck a fetching pose, leaning against one of the wisteria-laced columns.

After a few moments she sighed plaintively. "Such a lovely night..."

The ambassador's resonant voice replied from the shadows, "Indeed it is, Miss McCoy."

With feigned startlement, Jackie Lee glanced toward the swing. "Why -- Mister Ambassador! Ah didn't realize you were here!" She gulped as the Vulcan rose and walked toward her with an even, pantherish grace. He stopped a foot or two away.

"I regret having startled you," he said with a slight, formal bow.

Jackie lowered her lashes and glanced up at him with a coy artifice she'd been practicing since she had been a witchy little three-year-old. "That's quite all right," she drawled softly. "Think absolutely nothing of it." She surveyed him more closely, taking in the angles and planes of his fine-featured face, her eyes lingering on his sensual mouth. It made her weak in the knees.

"Tell me, now that you've spent a little time here, what do you think of our Georgia countryside?"

"A most pleasant environment," Sarek answered gravely. Something in his tone caught Jackie's attention.

"Have you been here before?"

"I have not been to Georgia, Miss McCoy, but I have been to Earth before this visit."

"Oh? When was that?"

"I was stationed as an attache at the Vulcan embassy here four years after I married."

Jackie Lee did some swift mental calculating -- faltering over her ignorance of his son's age -- and finally estimated Sarek to be no more than 64 years of age. Just right, she thought, comparing that against her own 49 years. She'd always thought that a man should ideally be a few years older than a woman.

She fluttered her lashes at him again. "You must have been very young at the time."

"Not quite so young as you seem to think, Miss McCoy," he replied. He understood now exactly where she had been leading. That her attentions were fruitless, he left for her to discover through experience, often, he had learned long ago, the best teacher.

"Oh...but of course you were! And the years have brought such maturity and polish, sir! Ah do so admire a mature man. One's early sixties can be so rewarding, don't you think?"

"Yes, Miss McCoy, although I suspect you have a number of years ahead of you before you reach that age."

"Why, yes, how kind of you to notice. And you must call me Jackie Lee."

"If you wish," Sarek conceded.

"As for the fruitfulness of one's sixties -- Ah expect that your life is proof of that."

"Indeed," said Sarek, voice soft with memory. "It was during that period of my life that I attained my post, my marriage to my wife, and saw the birth of our son."

"Your...post!...marriage?!...son?!" Jackie squealed, gaping at him, her eyes saucer-wide. "Ah don't understand."

Sarek raised a brow. "I thought I made myself perfectly clear, Miss McCoy. What is it that you fail to understand?"

"My name is Jackie Lee...Ah thought you said...the birth of your son occurred...in your sixties...!? But how could that be? Don't you mean your grandson's birth?" She gulped. "Ah must say, sir, for a man in his seventies, you're quite...er...well preserved." She colored, hoping that she hadn't offended the man, and was astonished by his look of surprise.

"I beg your pardon, Miss McCoy," he said, "but you seem to be laboring under a sizable misconception."

"Huh?" she gawked.

"I am well past my seventies. In fact, I am now into my one hundred seventh year."

When she could finally say anything at all she yelped, "You're what?"

"I said, I am into my one hundred seventh year of life; in standard years."

She stared up at him.

"Are you all right, Miss McCoy?" His voice was a blurred sound. She swayed toward him, quite believing that she just might faint.

Spock had been doing a little surreptitious hunting of his own around the Laurel Hollow manor. As he went from room to room and floor to floor through the large, graceful house, he became increasingly alarmed by the absence of his father and one Jacqueline Lee McCoy.

Throughout their first days and evenings at Laurel Hollow, Spock had noted Jackie's growing interest in -- indeed, it might almost be termed a compulsion toward -- Sarek of Vulcan. She seemed to have ignored the very substantial proof that the man was comfortably married, and concentrated all her efforts on snaring his attention. This morning, after a breakfast at which she'd behaved so shamelessly that Spock had scarcely refrained from making an acid comment, restraining himself for the sake of diplomacy, she had engaged Sarek in a totally useless tour of the buildings and gardens. Dinner was another example of Jackie Lee's Southern Strategy, and afterward she had obviously planned to monopolize Sarek's evening, but an extended after-dinner conversation involving the entire group had forestalled her infamous 'divide and conquer' maneuvering.

What troubled Spock most of all about the alarming turn of events was that his mother seemed to be oblivious to the entire matter. It was unlike her to be unaware of anything -- particularly anything quite so blatant as Jackie Lee's stalking of her husband. Perhaps, Spock reflected, she was so distracted by being on Earth again and the frequent solo visits she had been making over the last three days to her relatives, that she hadn't noticed.

With that danger signal in mind, Spock set out to find Jackie Lee and his father and disrupt whatever plan she might be putting into operation. How he would accomplish that feat presently escaped him, but he was certain that he would think of something.

He'd just begun to cross the main entry hall toward the door when Amanda came out of the library with a book in her hand.

"Why, Spock! What's wrong, dear? You seem absolutely ferocious and determined about something."

He stopped short, nodding respectfully as he dismissed as illogical an overpowering desire to shake her. "Mother," he began, exasperation edging his tone, "do you mean to say that you do not know what is going on?"

"Going on? Where? And with whom?" Amanda replied, her eyes wide and guileless. She gazed at her only, and much loved son with secret amusement. If he only knew how harassed he looked, he'd be positively (oh, very Vulcanly, to be sure) but absolutely furious that he'd allowed himself to reveal so much.

"Mother," he began again, controlling his impatience with some difficulty. "Have you seen Father or Miss McCoy of late?"

"Sarek and Jackie Lee? Oh, of course." She gave an airy wave in the direction of the front door. "They're out on the veranda."

"Together? Alone?"

Amanda looked as placid as a glass of milk. "Yes, of course -- together. And, yes, they're alone. Why do you ask?"

Spock clasped his hands behind him in an effort to remain calm. "How can you not have noticed that Miss McCoy has been, I believe the expression is, 'moving in on' Sarek?"

"Oh, Spock!" Amanda broke into delighted laughter which intensified at his horrified stare. "I didn't know you were so well acquainted with slang!"

Spock bridled, but said nothing.

Amanda smiled at him. "My dear, I am very much aware of what Miss McCoy is trying to accomplish. I'm really not quite so blind as you think."

"Indeed," was all Spock could manage.

"Yes...indeed," she replied, and with a sunny smile at her perplexed son, swept past him toward the stairs.

He wheeled, following her progress with an amazed stare. On the third step she turned. "Good night, Spock. I'm going to get into bed and read this book I found in the library. An old classic...*She Stoops to Conquer*. You might find it educational."

Spock suppressed a groan, wished his mother a good night's rest, and, with a squaring of his shoulders for battle, turned back to the front door.

Out on the veranda, Jackie Lee had just about recovered her shock at Sarek's revelation and was attempting to find a graceful way to retreat from his company.

One hundred and seven?! she thought wildly. The sheer weight of the numbers had abruptly defused her interest in the ambassador. Despite his still rather youthful appearance, she now took notice of the silver in his thick hair, the fine lines around both eyes and mouth -- and she belatedly recalled Amanda.

"Oh...Ah'm so sorry. Forgive my clumsiness," she begged, straightening with his aid. "Ah'm afraid Ah...er... must be feeling the...er...effects of that fine wine Ah had with dinner..."

Sarek's eyes held a trace of amusement that Jackie Lee missed entirely in her panicked urge to leave the scene of her aborted conquest attempt. He recognized exactly what was ailing the woman and it was an eventuality that dovetailed nicely with his own inclinations.

Just then, Spock stepped out onto the veranda, closing the front door behind him with a slightly louder than necessary bang. His eyes narrowed as he beheld what looked suspiciously like Jackie Lee in his father's arms.

"Father," he said with asperity. Sarek looked over Jackie Lee's head at his son, recognizing the challenge drawn in every line of Spock's taut body. His reply was bland.

"Yes, my son?"

Spock drew up beside Jackie Lee and looked a deep, piercing glance at his parent.

"Mother is awaiting you upstairs," he announced heavily. The senior Vulcan raised an eyebrow at his son's carefully masked disapproval.

"Indeed," he replied.

"Indeed," Spock countered. "If you can be spared here...."

"Oh...of course he can be spared!" Jackie Lee broke in, relieved. "It was very selfish of me to monopolize him this way. Go on, sir. Ah'm certain your wife would be glad of your company."

"Thank you, Miss McCoy." Sarek bowed gracefully. He wished there was a tactful way to warn Spock about this huntress, but experience was the best teacher. After all, since Spock was determined to intercede he could flounder

on his own. "Good night, Spock."

"Good night, Father." Spock felt an internal relaxation when Sarek turned away and strode into the house.

Jackie Lee had watched the exchange, wondering at the faint suggestion of tension. Now she began to observe the Starfleet officer before her with speculative interest.

Why, she wondered, had he been so anxious to see his father leave the veranda -- and her company?

Spock turned back to her and, with the grave, dignified charm that had felled more Terran females than even he could guess, inquired, "Miss McCoy, earlier you showed my father the immediate grounds of Laurel Hollow. I, too, am very much interested in your home. I should like to persuade you to provide me with such a tour -- if that is entirely agreeable to you."

A little stunned by the change of tactics, Jackie Lee gulped, "Now?"

Spock regarded her with deep, magnetic eyes. "Why not now? As I am unaccustomed to moonlight on my home planet, I would find a brief walk at this time, and with the proper guide, quite fascinating."

"Oh...Oh, of course." Jackie Lee suddenly smiled brilliantly at her new escort. He was very attractive, far younger than Sarek -- and unattached. And she'd finally figured out his behavior with his father. Spock was jealous!

She linked her arm through his as they stepped off the veranda together.

"Why, of course. Ah'd be charmed to show you the gardens this evening. And you're right; it is so very fascinating' in the moonlight. But Ah believe that -- if you're truly interested in Laurel Hollow and the grounds -- you might like to see all of our property. And the best way to do that is from horseback. You do ride, don't you, Spock?"

"Yes, Miss McCoy, I do."

"Oh," she drawled, smiling up into the fine boned face, "please, call me Jackie Lee."

"Very well...Jackie Lee," he acknowledged, stilling a thousand inner protests at the woman's proprietary manner.

"That's fine. Well, since you ride, we'll go for a ride tomorrow after breakfast, and Ah'll continue our tour of the property. You'll like it, Ah'm sure. And --" she paused, with a flash of a smile that bespoke a plot afoot, "Ah have a wonderful idea!"

He looked a question.

"Oh, yes! We'll take along a basket and have a picnic, down by the lower stream trail. You'll like that, too."

"Indeed," Spock replied. Jackie Lee captured his arm with a vengeance. He squared his shoulders resolutely. Well, no matter what happened, it was better having the woman bestow all her attentions on him.

"Surely...Jackie Lee..." he began, "we needn't take our tour tomorrow. We can leave that for another day. I am certain there are things we can do in the interim to occupy our time."

"Oh...oh, of course!...if you like." Jackie gave him another one of her smiles that reminded him so much of a le-matya, and took a firmer grip on his arm. "That would be lovely, and we'll just save our picnic for another day."

Spock nodded. He glanced back toward the lighted upstairs windows of his parents' small suite. He hoped Sarek would sleep well that night.

CHAPTER 5: BAFFLED

Sahaj overslept on the fifth morning of their visit to Laurel Hollow. No one had thought to wake him and he had worked up a good case of hidden 'grumps' by the time he dressed and went downstairs to the large, formal dining room where they'd been taking all their meals. He was the last to arrive.

Breakfast was a noisy, disorganized, 'do-it-yourself' buffet, a soothing balm to his cramped spirits. He'd been on his best behavior for the last five days and was aching to escape the sudden abundance of parental figures, who always seemed to have something planned for him to do. He'd seen enough museums, parklands and heard enough concerts with the reverend and Doctor McCoy, and his grandparents, to last him a lifetime. He had sat like part of the furniture during adult conversations, but had wondered why his father and Jackie Lee were not often included as part of the family group. A terrible suspicion was beginning to dawn on him.

The only good thing that had happened since their arrival was that Amanda had not arranged for her Vulcans to visit her relatives. As Sahaj had instantly picked up both Sarek's and Spock's dismay over such a prospect, he had allowed his curiosity to subside and joined ranks with the males of his clan.

As he neared the dining room, even that small consolation was destroyed, for Amanda had just mentioned the planned reunion, and the reverend was cheerfully offering to host the gathering of the Graysons at Laurel Hollow. No amount of dissuasion would make him change his mind. He hadn't had so many guests in years, and he was lonely with only that...er...Jackie Lee for company, and Laurel Hollow had a reputation to uphold for throwing the finest barbecues in the county. The reverend, Sahaj reflected as he helped himself to breakfast, was as good an actor as Jackie Lee.

There was an empty seat next to Sarek. Sahaj took it, bidding everyone good morning and apologizing for sleeping in. They returned the greeting.

"Good mornin', Sahaj, dear."

Sahaj almost knocked over his juice glass when the sickly sweet voice addressed him. He recovered both the glass and his composure and said stonily, "Good morning, Miss Jacqueline." She turned a smug smile on Spock, seated next to her, and Sahaj bit his lower lip so that he wouldn't say anything to her...or him...and concentrated on his meal, only half-listening to the spirited conversation going on around him.

"'Pears to me that if the Federation doesn't smarten up pretty soon, we're goin' to be overrun by those thievin' Klingons," the reverend was saying. He spread a generous helping of jam on a piece of toast. It made little difference to him that Sarek, the object of the remark, was sitting at the opposite end of the long table. Alan McCoy delivered many a sermon in the old church and knew how to make his voice project over the hubbub. "I tell you, sir, those Klingons can't be trusted. Why Ah'm willin' to bet Laurel Hollow that they are, at this very minute, breakin' their treaty by hobnobbing with the Romulans and the Kzinti. Before you know it they'll form an alliance and challenge the Federation. Where will we be then, I ask you?"

"Reverend McCoy," Sarek answered in a tone that effectively halted the cross conversations. "It is highly unlikely that such an alliance will be formed, considering the stringency of the present treaty."

"It still means war."

"War, war, war!" Jackie huffed. "Ah swear, Daddy, that's all you ever talk about these days! Ah swear you're getting senile! If Ah hear that word 'war' once more Ah'll just scream!"

The reverend glowered at her. "Shut up, Scarlett. Your daddy's talkin'." He turned back to Sarek, warming to the topic. Jackie Lee left the table in a snit.

"God's beard, Sarek! We haven't heard a word from the Organians in years! The Federation has a lot of enemies out there. We'd be in pretty bad shape if they banded together...and Vulcan would be the place they'd start."

"Vulcan has not been conquered in our recorded history, Reverend McCoy," Sarek replied smoothly. "You are basing your hypothesis on supposition, which is illogical."

"Don't give me logic, sir! What Ah'm talking about is a feeling -- a hunch! The Federation is mighty smug with itself right now, asittin' on its laurels! If they don't open their eyes pretty soon, we're all gonna be in a heapa trouble. Now, what we need is someone in an influential position to convince those stuffed shirts that are runnin' this whole shebang --"

"Have some more toast, Dad," Leonard McCoy interjected hastily, having caught the rash of upraised eyebrows. The reverend pushed the proffered plate away, intent on his idea.

"Now, you're in a position to do something about this, Sarek. Why don't you bring it up at your next Council meeting?...."

Sahaj swallowed wrong. He coughed, choking back a snort of laughter. Oh, he could just see it now: Sarek, drawing T'Pol to the side, and trying casually to convince her that Vulcan was in danger of being ransacked. She'd have Sarek sent to the healers post haste. Sahaj was suddenly aware of two Vulcan stares leveled at him, and composed himself. Sarek turned back to the battle.

"I think not, sir. I --" He wanted to say more, to engage the retired minister in a spirited debate, but a discreet kick under the table from Amanda negated that plan. The reverend had no such censoring partner, although it was obvious from the expression on young Doctor McCoy's face that he wished there were.

"Ah just purely don't understand that, sir. You Vulcans are a peaceful lot, aren't you?"

"Yes," Sarek answered hesitantly.

"And you prefer talk to war, right?"

Sarek nodded. The reverend sat back, sure of having won his point. "Then it 'pears to me that you'd jump at the chance to prevent a war."

The battle went on, and Sahaj suspected that it just might turn into the galactic holocaust that the reverend was prophesizing, with Vulcan and Terra going at it, full blast. Sarek, Sahaj knew, was itching to get a few hours alone with Reverend Alan, to sit him down and straighten him out, once and for all. Both Sarek and Alan McCoy seemed to enjoy their 'discussions', regardless of who initiated them. And once begun, the other party would immediately take the opposite side.

With Amanda planning a morning shopping trip, they'd have their chance to thrash out this topic of debate. Sahaj felt a stab of jealousy. At least they'd have something to do today.

"Father," Sahaj said, not disturbing the interplanetary war. Spock lifted inquiring eyes to him. "Do you think we could go horseback riding this morning? I could show you around and all."

"I think not, Sahaj."

"Why not?"

"I have already made plans for this morning."

"What plans?"

Spock was saved answering by Jackie Lee's grand reentrance into the room. She had changed into a tailored suede

and silk riding outfit and had tied a flamboyant pink scarf around her neck.

"Shall we be starting, Spock?" she asked gaily. "We're packed and ready to go."

Packed?! Sahaj thought incredulously. Where were they going now??

Spock rose. "I am quite ready, Miss McCoy. Thank you." He gestured to the door, indicating that she should precede him into the hall.

"Ah think you'll like the mount Ah've chosen for you. His name is Nero. And Ah've prepared a special feast for you."

Horses. Food. They were going on a picnic, and leaving him behind! This whole thing was getting out of hand. Sahaj threw a despairing look at the rest of his 'family', but except for Doctor McCoy, everyone else seemed ignorant of what was happening here. And all Leonard McCoy was doing was sitting there with his eyes twinkling.

Sahaj hurriedly excused himself from the table and followed Spock and Jackie Lee into the hall.

"Father," he called. Spock turned back. "Father, can I talk to you for a minute before you go?" Jackie Lee gave him a poisonous look, but said sweetly,

"Ah'll have the horses brought around front."

Spock nodded, and as her footsteps receded down the hall, waited for Sahaj to explain.

"Not here. In Uncle Len's old office...please."

Spock's eyebrow elevated slightly. He'd heard that tone before...frequently...as a boy. Sahaj had captured Sarek's 'lecturing voice' exactly. He followed the boy into the office.

"Sit down, Father, please." Sahaj indicated the leather couch. "This may take a few minutes."

"It would be most improper to keep Miss McCoy waiting," Spock reminded him.

"I know. I won't keep you long."

Spock took the indicated seat, stretching his long legs before him and folded his arms across his chest. "Proceed."

Sahaj paced the length of the room, hands clasped behind him, his expression serious. He came to a halt before Spock, straightening to what was beginning to become a dignified height. "Father," he said somberly, "I realize it is not my place to broach this subject; however, it is something that has caused me great concern over the past few days." Having got that much out, Sahaj found that he was at a loss for words. He looked to Spock for help and read encouragement there.

"It is best to discuss the matter. Perhaps you will discover that your concern is unjustified."

"Father..." Sahaj began anew. Tuc-ret! Might as well just jump into it. "What are you doing?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"With Jackie Lee."

"I am doing nothing...at the present time. The lady in question is waiting for me to join her." Spock hid well the glint of laughter that suddenly brightened his eyes.

"You know what I mean. She's been hanging around you for the last few days and you don't do anything to discourage her."

Sahaj had been right to begin with. He should not have brought up the subject. Spock decided that another object lesson would benefit his son. Indeed, experience was the best teacher, as Sarek would agree. He rose and put a reassuring hand on Sahaj's shoulder.

"Sahaj, were you not the one who advised me to obtain a bondsmate?"

The youth's eyes widened, appalled. "I?" he gulped.

"Yes. On the Forge, the night we began our journey back to ShiKahr. Do you not recall our discussion?"

Sahaj swallowed hard. "Yes, Father, but I didn't mean her!"

"Didn't I also tell you to allow me my own choice in this matter?"

"Yes, Father." Sahaj was defeated.

"Thank you. Now, if you will excuse me, Miss McCoy is still waiting. We shall return some time this afternoon."

Sahaj watched his father leave, his young shoulders drooping. This was a fine mess! And he could see no way out of it. If he obeyed his instincts and made things difficult for Jackie Lee, he'd be stomped on so fast that he wouldn't know whose foot had done the damage...and there would be a large field of contenders for that dubious honor. No, he'd just have to keep his mouth shut and hope that Spock would come to his senses soon, and put an end to this farce. Why Jackie Lee, of all people?! Sahaj groaned, and obeyed a sudden impulse to kick the couch. It was most unVulcan, but it made him feel better.

"Sahaj!"

Sahaj opened the office door and stared bleakly out. Doctor McCoy was just coming from the dining room. He was obviously in high spirits.

"Sahaj! Been lookin' for you. How about a ride?"

"I guess so."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"I know you better than that. You're wearing that special look that tells me you've got something on your mind. 'Fess up. What is it?"

Sahaj shrugged, casting a surreptitious look into the dining room to see if they would be overheard -- if he decided to tell him. McCoy noticed.

"Your grandmother just left and Sarek and my father have locked themselves into the library. No one will hear us."

"It's about Father," Sahaj confided. He let McCoy guide him to one of the benches and sat down beside him, but only for a moment. He got up and began to pace.

"What about your father?"

"He's acting..." Sahaj searched for an accurate word and finally settled on "...dumb!"

McCoy muffled a snort of laughter. "How is he acting... 'dumb'?"

"With..." Sahaj paused and mentally backtracked. "Maybe I shouldn't say it...after all, she is your sister."

"My sister...the practicing witch?"

"You keep calling her that," Sahaj said gravely. "Does Jackie Lee engage in black magic?"

"No," McCoy said, deadpan, "she's just a witch and she's not very good at it so she has to keep practicing." All he got was a small sigh of patient exasperation and a raised eyebrow from the young Vulcan. McCoy altered the tone of his voice to a serious note to match Sahaj's mood. "Go ahead. Tell me the rest of it."

"Uncle Len, I just don't know what to do. Father goes out of his way to be nice to Jackie Lee. She's been hanging around him like a...like a...sehlat, and now, this picnic of theirs...! It's got to stop. He won't listen to me. Maybe you can talk some sense into him."

"What is it -- exactly -- that you'd like me to tell him?"

"I...well..." Sahaj dropped his gaze and blurted, "I don't want Jackie Lee for a mother!"

It took a second for that to sink in. When it did, McCoy began to laugh. This was priceless! Sahaj, so worried...! Tears streaming down his face, helpless to explain his reaction to the puzzled and slightly annoyed young man facing him, McCoy rode it out until he could finally draw in a breath without convulsing. He wiped the moisture from his face and subsided into an occasional chuckle, then reached out and drew Sahaj a step closer.

"Sahaj, let me assure you that you have nothing to worry about," he said, grinning.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you have nothing to worry about," the doctor reiterated. "Your father happens to be one of the best diplomats I've ever met. Must be inherited. Just sit back and enjoy the play."

"I don't get it," Sahaj complained. McCoy rose and mussed the boy's hair. Sahaj immediately combed it back into place with his fingers.

"You will. Just trust me. You have nothing to worry about. Now, how about that ride? Delilah can use the exercise. We'll take the upper stream trail and be back in time for lunch."

CHAPTER 6: 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

"Well, here we are, at last," Jackie Lee said in a tone of relief that belied her deliberately roundabout journey over the acreage of Laurel Hollow.

Spock gave her a speculative look, then glanced around. 'Here' proved to be a small grove of ancient, gnarled trees that overhung a wide stream. To Spock's eyes, there was nothing either more or less distinguished about this particular location than any other he'd thusfar seen on his many tours of the countryside. However, Jackie Lee had dismounted and he followed suit, letting Nero's reins fall to the ground. Jackie Lee had claimed the black was a troublesome sort and he decided to take no chances. He laid a hand briefly on the horse's fine head, establishing contact and defusing any roaming impulses engendered in the equine skull. Nero stood docilely.

Jackie Lee had removed the pink scarf from around her neck and was using it as a fan. She leaned back against the wide trunk of the largest tree, showing off both her trim figure and her costume to sly advantage. She smiled -- Spock supposed the correct adverb would have been 'winsomely' -- and said unnecessarily, "We'll stop here. This is the perfect spot for our picnic."

The characteristics that defined this particular place as more perfect than any other were still invisible to Spock.

"There's a blanket behind my saddle. Would you get it and spread it out under this tree?"

He nodded, complying, aware of her eyes following his every move.

"It's lovely, don't you think, Spock?" she asked in a lilting voice as he spread both the blanket and a checkered cloth she indicated was to follow.

Without looking up he replied, "Yes, Miss McCoy. Most refreshing."

"Oh, now Spock," she scolded gently, "Ah thought we were past formalities. Ah told you to call me Jackie Lee. Everyone else does."

"Indeed."

A frown of annoyance crossed her smooth face at his stubbornness, but she quickly rearranged her features, shrugging mentally. *If he insists on being mule-headed....* She crossed to where he was standing, looking at the stream and the sun-dappled green hillside beyond.

"The view from that hilltop is really quite beautiful," she told him. "You can see for miles. Later on, we'll cross over and take a look. You can see most of Laurel Hollow and the land all around from up there. It's got the best view in the county -- and it's on our property." Her smugness was obvious, but Spock made no comment, briefly wondering if Jackie Lee would have thought Valjn'd'jt more valuable had it been situated atop the highest peak in the L-langon mountains. He abandoned the speculation to heed her latest request.

"Please get the basket."

The compact basket looked like the typical antique, but Spock guessed it was lined with thermal materials and divided into compartments to hold food and utensils. Jackie Lee sat on the blanket, spreading the dove gray suede riding skirt around her with careful attention of how best to set herself off. When she opened the small basket, Spock's suspicions were confirmed. Not only was it sectioned, it was fully packed. As the woman set out plates and napkins, she smiled at him. He was beginning to find it both annoyingly persistent and slightly moronic. He longed to be back among less frivolous folk, whether human or Vulcan.

"Ah've been thinking, Spock," she said as she worked. Spock quelled a terrible desire to question whether that was humanly possible in her case, and waited. "I would like it very much if you would tell me something of your home and your life there."

"Are you referring to the Enterprise, Miss McCoy?"

"Why...er...no, of course not. I was thinking of your planet, Vulcan."

"As I no longer live there it cannot be properly referred to as my home, Miss McCoy."

"It can't?" Jackie Lee was so nonplussed she forgot to remind him to address her with less formality.

"No. The Enterprise is my home, as it is to your brother. Surely he has acquainted you with the details of life about a starship." Spock noted Jackie Lee's scowl.

"Yes. He's sent home tapes from time to time." She patted her hair. "Father has the time to listen to all that."

"I see."

Spock's greatest saving grace in the interchange was his Vulcan mask of unemotionalism. Those who knew him well had learned to read the flashes of expression in the soft sable eyes, and the minute quirks of lips or eyebrow that spelled reaction. But Jackie Lee McCoy was completely unaware of the irony, sarcasm, and now disgust, that crossed his angular features. All she could see was the imperturbable masculine strength of those features and she simply wasn't shrewd enough to look beyond, which saved them both a good deal of discomfort.

"Uh...Spock, while Ah'm preparing the food, why don't you unsaddle Hannibal for me?"

"Is that wise, Miss McCoy? He could roam."

"Hannibal is a remarkably well-trained mount," Jackie Lee replied, huffing. "He won't wander unless Ah tell him to. Just leave his halter on him. He'll stay right nearby. You'll see."

The Vulcan nodded and went to attend the horse. When he returned Jackie was in the process of spreading out food containers. Spock experienced a moment of distasteful surprise. He kept to himself the opinion that tables and chairs were a more efficient and sanitary method of dining, suspecting that the woman would not appreciate such a judgment passed on her al fresco jaunt. Spock's only previous such experiences had been desert and mountain hikes on Vulcan where scientific investigation was the main purpose of the experience and the consumption of rations only regarded as necessary to comfortable survival. Other than that, a few expeditions with Starfleet while a cadet, and later as a line officer, but always with some purpose in mind for the journey other than mere eating. Once again, he reflected privately on the peculiarities of the human animal, this female in particular. No wonder Leonard

McCoy had such a peculiar sense of humor and strange habits.

Spock knelt on the other side of the blanket and watched with growing fascination as Jackie Lee uncovered the food container. It was apparent that there was about to be another minor disagreement.

A thermal basket of fried chicken was followed by a loaf of crispy, crusted bread, a wedge of cheese and a small container of fresh fruit. Spock surveyed the food.

"Miss McCoy, had you planned on guests?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask?"

"There is enough food here to feed several people very generously. I assumed you must have intended the repast for a number of others as well. If not, it is wasteful to have brought so much."

Jackie Lee frowned. "It won't go to waste, if that's what's worrying you," she said testily. "We'll take back what we don't finish."

He observed her blandly. "It is inefficient to bring more than will be needed only to return it. Would it not have been better to have planned the supplies to avoid such a necessity?"

She looked nearly apoplectic for a few moments, until she remembered she was attempting to lay claim to this impossible man. She contained herself by force. The smile she gave him had more teeth in it than heart, but when she offered him the basket of chicken she had recovered herself.

She leaned forward seductively, aware of the perilous plunge of the open-necked pink blouse she wore.

"Some breast? Or do you prefer legs, Spock?"

Not one eyelash twitched as he regarded her coolly. "Madam, Vulcans do not consume animal flesh."

Her ploy ruined, Jackie Lee gaped. "Oh?...Oh...Ah'm sorry...Ah didn't think..."

Mentally, Spock rejoined, 'apparently not'.

To cover her confusion, she rewrapped the chicken and looked forlornly at the cheese and fruit. "Ah'm afraid this will have to do."

"It is sufficient, Miss McCoy. It will 'do' nicely."

Placated, Jackie Lee smiled prettily. This was so much better. She turned to retrieve the bottle of wine from its coolant sleeve. When she handed the bottle to him along with a vacuum cork remover, Spock raised an eyebrow at her.

"Well, open it. That's what we're going to drink."

"Perhaps it is what you will drink, but I shall not. Vulcans do not consume alcoholic beverages." It wasn't the strictest truth but Spock was not about to lose one whit of his mental faculties while in Jackie Lee's company.

Irrked at her second mistake, she grumped, "That's what Leonard told me this morning when he saw me packing the basket. On his account, Ah also brought along some iced tea. You will drink that, won't you?"

"That would be satisfactory, Miss McCoy."

Under her breath she growled, "My name is Jackie Lee!" She busied herself with returning the wine and pouring the iced tea for them both.

Spock accepted the mug and sat quietly, sipping the tea, surveying the scene. He was acutely aware that Jackie Lee was simultaneously surveying him.

Presently, she sighed languidly, leaning back on one hand. Spock supposed if she had been someone far different -- or he had -- he would have been very much taken with the picture she presented.

"Oh, this is the life," she drawled. "A loaf of wine --" She clapped a hand to her mouth. "Ah mean -- A jug of bread...Drat!"

Spock turned, his face a stone mask. Fortunately, Jackie Lee had also not learned to read the amusement in his eyes. In a monotone, he told her,

"I believe the quote is: 'A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou beside me in the wilderness'."

She flushed and smiled weakly. "Oh, yes. Why, how silly of me.... Of course." The gleaming glance she turned on him confirmed his growing suspicions. The main purpose for Jackie's 'picnic' had now become apparent and it belatedly occurred to Spock that Terrans weren't so different from Vulcans after all, since obviously the meal was the least of the reasons for this...expedition.

She leaned toward him and laid a hand on his arm. "Spock, have you considered remarrying?"

Covering his shock at her directness, he replied, "Madam, as I have never been married, your reference to remarrriage is inaccurate."

She gulped. "But...but..." she spluttered, "then - where did you get Sahaj?"

The thought that came to Spock was 'I found him in the plomeek patch', but he said, "In the usual manner, Miss McCoy."

"My name is Jackie Lee..." she murmured, stunned. "But...Ah thought...that is...."

"You were incorrect."

She stared at him, open mouthed. "Don't Vulcans marry?" she squeaked.

Spock gave brief consideration to the merits of saying no, and reluctantly rejected the idea with a thought for his mother back at Laurel Hollow. "That is the usual and desired custom."

Jackie sighed with relief, still round-eyed with shock. "Er...ah...and what about you?"

"To what are you referring?"

"Why -- marriage, of course. Er...that is, yours."

"I am not married, Madam."

"I know that. Don't you intend to be?...Ah mean...Ah thought...that is, you said Vulcans do marry."

"Indeed."

"Well, aren't you going to? Marry, that is?"

"Madam, I have no immediate need of a mate and my present commitment to my career would not logically allow for such a relationship."

"Oh," she said, recovering some of her composure. "Perhaps not immediately...but...sometime, certainly. Besides, that boy of yours needs a mother to...er...guide him while you're away."

"Sahaj is receiving excellent care and guidance from my parents, with whom he lives."

"Oh...well...but even so, he needs...attention...affection...."

A pained look crossed Spock's face and was quickly gone. "I assure you, Miss McCoy, Sahaj receives a great deal of attention and...affection...at Valjn'd'jt."

"What about you, then? Certainly you have your career now...but a man isn't meant to be alone always...especially not such an attractive man --"

Spock was on his feet in one swift, smooth motion. To cover his discomfort he looked toward the hill across the stream. "You remarked earlier that we might view a substantial portion of the surrounding countryside from that hill. I believe I would like to see it now."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now." He extended a hand and helped her up, then started toward the stream.

"Where are you going?" He turned. "That stream is deeper in some spots than you think. And if you think Ah'm going to get one drop of water on these clothes..."

He stood at the edge. "I have been watching the water's surface since we arrived. There is a series of rocks just breaking the surface which constitutes a trail leading directly across the stream. It should be relatively simple to use them as stepping stones."

Jackie Lee craned her neck to see. "Ah can't get these boots wet! How do you propose Ah get across? You're tall enough to reach the stones in one stride. Ah'm not!" She stood, hands on hips.

"That can be remedied." Resigned, he picked her up and started across, going slowly; surefooted, but careful.

Delighted, Jackie Lee settled down, her arms around his neck, enjoying his strength and his hard body against her, reveling in his warmth. He wasn't even breathing hard.

"Spock," she said with soft coyness, the fingers on one hand trailing along the back of his neck. "You didn't answer my question before...about marriage..."

He looked at her solemnly. "Miss McCoy, I told you that I have no need for a mate at present. When I do, I shall give the matter the attention it deserves."

"But you might not find anybody all that easily. Ah mean -- don't you think you ought to consider all the possibilities?"

He arched a brow at her, negotiating the stones casually.

"Ah mean...you might want to consider...well...a human wife, like your father did...." she let her voice trail off suggestively, studying him carefully from beneath lowered lashes. The eyes so close to her own were very deep, soft and sensuous. She missed the cant of the eyebrow and the fact that they'd stopped moving. She leaned toward him, feeling compelled by his nearness to...to...

"Miss McCoy," he broke in coolly, "are you offering yourself as a candidate?"

She reared back, staring. "Am -- Ah -- what?!"

"I asked if you were offering yourself as a candidate for marriage to me?"

"Well! Ah never! Ah don't know what your customs are, but around here the gentleman asks the lady to marry him. The idea! As if Ah would just throw myself at you -- as if Ah were so desperate that --" She spluttered off into an incoherent flare of temper. Spock was merely amused.

"Miss McCoy, contain yourself. There is no need for your display. I assure you I have no intention of taking you to wife."

At that, Jackie Lee exploded in his arms and began struggling, arms and legs flailing to the peril of their balance.

"Miss McCoy!" Spock's voice was sharper, a warning. "If you will contain your disappointment --"

"Contain my --?! Oh -- that's the limit! You rude, conceited, pointed-eared --! Put me down this instant, do you hear? Ah wouldn't spend another minute in the company of such a boor! Didn't you hear me?! Ah said, put me down!"

Spock looked at her with the blandly innocent gaze that his captain would have recognized instantly as boding some special Vulcan mischief. "Are you certain?" he inquired politely.

She screamed at him, red-faced. "Yes! Ah'm certain!"

"Very well."

Spock simply let go of her. Having determined that they were standing over one of the deeper pools in the stream where there were no chances of anything besides her dignity being injured, he complied with her wishes and leapt back toward the bank. The splash behind him was loud and large and he couldn't avoid being splattered with a sheet of flying droplets, but deep within his human heart there was a little shrill of warmth. The practical joker who had slept within him since his kahs-wan stood up and cheered.

"You --!!" spluttered Jackie Lee, half water, half curses pouring out as Spock strode gracefully to shore. He turned when he gained the bank, clamping trained facial muscles on the expression that threatened to break through. In the middle of the stream sat Jackie Lee, breast-deep and soaked with water, screaming imprecations at him, their volume and fury growing by the minute. He marveled at her vocabulary; it would have put a tramp space trader to shame.

He drew himself up and said icily, "Madam! Such language is reprehensible. I will not waste my time in the company of one who cannot comport herself with greater dignity. Good day."

Spock walked toward his horse. As he passed Hannibal, who stood peacefully cropping grass, a devilish expression flitted over his face. The subliminal practical joker had one more shot to deliver before he was locked back where he belonged. Spock patted the horse's head, allowing his hand to linger for an extra moment or two. Then he mounted Nero and turned back toward Laurel Hollow. Hannibal fell into step behind him.

As they set off at a stately walk Jackie Lee's furious screeching ascended the treble scale and finally reached the level of the bird calls around them in the trees. With supreme Vulcan aplomb, Spock rode on.

CHAPTER 7: THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

Leonard McCoy had been sitting in his favorite spot on the porch since he and Sahaj had returned from their ride, warming his body in the sun and cooling his throat and stomach with a tall, icy mint julip. He stretched lazily, looking out over the rolling greenness of his favorite view, thinking that, in a way, he really ought to thank Jackie Lee. Her untimely and fortunately incorrect emergency summons had brought him home at one of the nicest times of the year. And Lord knew how long it would be before he'd see the place, or his family, again.

His reverie was broken by the unexpected and startling sight of Spock, mounted on Nero, riding back from the direction of the lower stream trail. Behind him, without saddle or bridle, but walking as placidly as a cart horse, was Hannibal.

Spock nodded to McCoy and rode past, disappearing around the corner of the house in the direction of the stable. A few minutes later, he reappeared around the side of the house where he mounted the porch. "Good day, Doctor," he said as he passed the physician.

"Uh...good day, Spock." McCoy suddenly realized that the Vulcan was going right on into the house without another word. "Say, Spock..."

"Yes?"

McCoy looked around once more for Jackie Lee, of whom there was still no sign. "Ah...you didn't get rid...ah...no, of course not..." He looked back at Spock. "Well, you didn't, did you?"

"Didn't what, Doctor?"

"Oh, never mind. I must be hallucinating." He turned away, mumbling to himself. Spock chose to ignore the comment about Tal Shaya and went into the house.

It was at least a half hour later and McCoy was beginning to be bored by the inactivity, when a completely ludicrous figure came into sight from the direction of the lower stream trail.

At first, musing and half drowsing in the sun, he didn't recognize Jackie Lee as she staggered toward the house, still cursing, holding the broken heel of one boot in her hand like a weapon. Her riding crop dangled limply from her wrist.

The pink silk blouse and dove gray suede skirt were soaked, shrinking even as he watched, and her ineffectual tugs at the sopping material were no help whatsoever. Still-damp hair tumbled wildly in all directions and there was stream-bottom mud all over the once-elegant suede boots, her legs, the skirt, both hands...and the face from which she'd been pushing back her hair. McCoy leaned forward, squinted, blinked, straightened and rose slowly to his feet, open-mouthed. A clod of mud fell from her hair into her blouse. She stopped, threw down her boot heel in fury, and shrieked, stamping both feet and pulling at her hair.

McCoy couldn't help himself. He guffawed, clutching at his middle, doubling over. Startled, Jackie Lee looked toward the porch where her brother was leaning on a pillar and laughing -- at her!

"Why you...you...you --!" she spluttered, vibrating with fury. "Laugh at me, will you, you jackass!"

Leonard McCoy only laughed harder. With every howl of glee from him, a louder choleric shriek erupted from Jackie Lee until finally, brandishing her riding crop above her head like a scimitar, she took off after him. Still convulsed with laughter, he barely managed to stay a step or two ahead of her as he made for the safety of the side yard.

Two heads appeared at an open upper window, one human, one Vulcan. They watched Jackie Lee chase McCoy around the side of the house.

Deeply pained, Sarek sighed. "Amanda, when are we going home?"

"Not yet, dear. I have plans."

Leonard McCoy easily outsprinted his bedraggled sister and when he reached the paddock fence in back of the house, stopped to catch his breath. But the image evoked by Jackie's appearance -- the comeuppance she so well deserved -- set him howling with glee anew. He folded his arms on the top rail and leaned his forehead against his hands. Impotent with laughter, he didn't hear the crunch of boots on gravel until it was too late and Jackie's riding crop caught him squarely across his backside. He sobered instantly, whirling to capture her wrist before she could lower another blow.

"Are you outta your mind?!" He glared at her furiously, and wrenched the crop from her. "Nevermind. Don't answer that. It was a stupid question. You're plumb crazy, woman!"

Her lower lip began to tremble. Her eyes were suddenly moist. "What kind of brother are you that you'd let that creature treat me so horribly?! Ah have never been so mortified in my life! Oh, Leonard, you are so mean and so cru-el...!" She pressed up close against him, palms of her hands on his chest, and leaned her head against his shoulder. With that, she began to cry. Leonard gritted his teeth and glowered at the world in general.

"I'm not going to fall for this act, Jackie," he warned, glancing at her suspiciously.

"Oh, Leon-ard!" she wailed, sobbing into his shirt even harder. Guilt smote him with lightning force. Poor thing -- she was really upset! The anger faded from his eyes and patted her shoulder comfortingly.

"Jackie?"

She didn't answer. He took her by the shoulders gently and drew back, holding her in place so he could look at her.

"Come on, honey, it's all right," he offered soothingly. "Tell me what happened...stop crying first...Jackie, please!"

"That...that...that --"

"Whoa! Don't say it! You're a lady, remember?"

"Even...dripping?!"

He nodded and bit back a smile. The lopsided curvature of lips she adopted in return was hardly satisfactory, but it was better than her tears. "Now," he instructed. "Start again."

"That...that..."

"Spock," he supplied.

"That Spock! That...that..."

"Ah-ah-ah-!" he admonished.

"...tadpole! That Vulcan! He dropped me into the stream just because I asked if he were married."

McCoy's eyebrows did a short jig. "That doesn't sound at all like Spock --"

"Well, Ah'm not lying!" she snapped.

"'Course not. What else did you say?"

"Oh, that's not important now! My outfit is just ruined!" Her eyes clouded up again. "And that awful man took Hannibal and I had to walk all the way back from the glen. Why, my saddle and all that food and everythin' had to be left there!"

She was sniffing, and dangerously close to tears again. "I'll get them for you," Leonard volunteered, hoping to forestall the flood. She pushed him away and dabbed at her eyes.

"Don't you patronize me, Leonard! If you were any kind of a brother you'd defend my honor!"

"Why, Jackie, I had no idea that your 'honor' was ever at stake." It took real effort for Leonard to hold back a smile.

"And don't make fun of me, either! Ah've never been so humiliated in all my born days! How dare he!"

"Now, Jackie Lee...."

"Well aren't you goin' to do anything at all about this?"

"Just because you went all magnolia blossoms and tried to fan the wrong fire --"

"Leonard!" She started to sob and Doctor McCoy knew he had been licked.

"Oh, all right. I'll have a talk with him."

"Well, Ah should hope so!"

"All right. All right! Now you best get on upstairs and change out of those wet clothes before they cut off your circulation."

She nodded, and together they started back to the house.

"Oh, my best riding outfit...! and my boots! Uncivilized barbarian! Ah'll never forgive him, or you for bringing those aliens here."

McCoy bridled. "Well, you should know who and what you're dealing with before you set your claws for a man, Jackie. Now just calm down. I'll get you a new outfit, honey."

"You?! You let me get into this mess!"

"I couldn't have stopped you once you had your head set. I never could." He ushered her in through the front door. "It could have been worse."

"Ah don't see how!"

"He could have accepted your proposal and you would have had to go live on Vulcan."

Her eyes widened. She pressed her hand above her breasts. "How dreadful! Ah never thought about that! Ah suppose Ah should be grateful Ah found out when Ah did. Providence has saved me from a terrible, terrible mistake!"

Providence, McCoy thought, and a little help from Spock and your mouth...and a stream.

CHAPTER 8: ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE

The large entry foyer was dim after the brightness of daylight, and smelled faintly of wood polish. The canaries twittered happily in their cage. Spock mounted the stairs at an even trot, intent on changing into a clean uniform, but slowed, and finally stopped before he reached the second floor. Sahaj was sitting dejectedly on the top step, both elbows resting on his knees, his chin cradled in his hands. He sighed plaintively, and looked up. The question reflected in his eyes changed to puzzlement.

"Father...you're all wet."

"Your use of the word 'all' is inaccurate, Sahaj. If you will excuse me, I intend to remedy the situation."

Without breaking position, Sahaj scooped over to allow Spock room to pass. He waited until Spock had taken several steps down the hall before announcing, in funereal tones:

"Well, you'd better get dressed right."

Spock stopped and looked back. "I beg your pardon?"

"We gotta get dressed right. She said so."

"To which 'she' are you referring, Sahaj?"

"Grandmother. She says we gotta get dressed right."

It seemed Sahaj had developed a regrettable tendency to repeat himself.

"Where is she taking you?"

"It's not me she's taking. It's us. We gotta go visit her relatives. She wants us to see them before the bar-becue."

Spock folded his arms across his chest. "Sahaj," he began in what the boy knew was his lecturing voice, "I have tried to instruct you, as has your grandfather, in the importance of the family unit to Vulcan. It is a duty to honor one's relatives. To bid one's respect is part of that duty and your grandmother's family has been too long without the benefit of her presence. You will be expected, as a member of our family, to conduct yourself as befits a Vulcan. Is that clear?"

Sahaj looked even more downcast. "Yes, Father."

"Very well. Where is your grandmother at present?"

"In her room." Without looking, Sahaj added, "Is Jackie Lee going, too?"

Spock did not answer at once. Sahaj turned, finally. "This is a family reunion, is it not, Sahaj?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Miss McCoy a member of our family?"

"No, sir...not yet, anyway."

"Unless you plan on changing her status, Miss McCoy will not be attending the reunion. Now, I'd suggest you comply with your grandmother's wishes and change into suitable attire."

Sahaj brightened considerably. He rose, with a cheerful, "Yes, Father!" and headed down the hall to his room.

At the end of the second floor hall was the small suite which had been assigned to Spock's parents. He knocked politely on the door.

"Come in," called Amanda. She was seated before the empty fireplace in the tiny sitting room. The door to the bedroom beyond was open, but Sarek was nowhere to be seen. "Oh, Spock, I'm glad you've returned. How was the picnic?"

Spock considered. "Uneventful," he replied.

"Oh, well, that's nice." Amanda's mind was obviously on other things. She had one of their travel cases open and was hemming a new dress with furious diligence.

"Mother, about this visit Sahaj tells me you're planning --"

"Not 'planning', Spock. We're going." She gave him a meaningful sapphire glance.

"Yes." He squared his shoulders with determination. "Mother, I have come to tell you that I shall not be accompanying you on this --"

"Would you like to bet?" she dared. Bela Oxmyxx would have admired the curl of her lip.

Spock was flabbergasted and still framing a reply when Sarek stepped out of the bedroom.

"Amanda, I have been giving this planned visit much thought, and I have concluded that, under the circumstances, it might be best for you to go alone."

Amanda laid aside her sewing, stood and addressed her Vulcans.

"Forget it, Sarek. You," she tapped his chest for emphasis, "and you," she swung toward Spock, "and you," she said to Sahaj who had just stuck his head around the door, "are going. I do not want to hear any more about it. Understand?"

There were three pained sighs as Amanda disappeared into the bedroom and shut the door behind her. The Vulcans exchanged mutually sympathetic glances. Sahaj, looking glum, left to get dressed 'right'.

From the doorway, Spock thoughtfully inquired, "Have you ever considered yourself -- I believe the term is -- 'henpecked', Father?"

Sarek looked like a martyr. "Only on this planet, my son. I feel a great need to return home...soon."

Spock had just smoothed his dress uniform tunic into place when someone knocked on the bedroom door. He reached automatically for a touch-plate that didn't exist, raised an eyebrow at the action, and crossed the room to open the door himself. Leonard McCoy was standing in the hall looking like -- what was the expression? -- the cat that had swallowed the canary?

"Spock, can I speak to you for a minute? You're going out?"

Spock explained the trip his mother had planned in a few terse phrases.

"Oh. Well, this won't take long. About Jackie Lee..."

"Doctor," Spock said levelly, "at the time it seemed the logical solution." McCoy grinned at that. "However, it was not proper behavior, and I do regret having done it. I was most discourteous toward your sister."

"She probably deserved it."

"Irrelevant. As soon as I return this evening I shall make my apologies to her, and offer recompense --"

"Better wait until morning," McCoy advised. "Give her time to cool off a bit. And I'll take care of her riding outfit."

"It was ruined by my actions, Doctor."

"Be that as it may, Spock, it's worth it to me to see her put royally in her place with such expertise. My commendations on your style.... Well, I told her I'd talk to you and I guess I've done my brotherly duty. Have a nice time at the Graysons...and thanks."

The suite door opened further down the hall. Amanda, followed by Sarek, stepped through the doorway. She had donned her new dress with queenly dignity, and she nodded approval at Spock's choice of garb. Sarek was wearing formal attire, complete with ambassadorial badge.

"I'm glad you're ready, Spock," she beamed.

"Well, ma'am! You look positively spectacular!" McCoy said, radiating gallantry. He sobered suddenly and caught Sarek's eye. "I hope you don't mind my sayin' so, sir."

"A Vulcan does not protest the truth."

"Where's Sahaj?" Amanda asked before McCoy had absorbed Sarek's answer.

"I'm here." Sahaj came out of his room in time to answer for himself. He shrugged uncomfortably in his white clan outfit. "I feel like an android," he said under his breath.

"Androids do not 'feel', Sahaj."

"Yes, Grandfather."

"How are you folks getting over to the Graysons' place?" McCoy asked.

"I've ordered an aircar," Amanda told him. Something in his expression raised her suspicions. "Don't tell me they haven't delivered it yet!"

"Well, ma'am, I'm afraid I'll have to. But don't worry, you can borrow ours."

"I don't think --" Sarek began.

"Thank you, Leonard. It's very kind of you." Amanda gathered her family with a glance and started for the stairway.

When they'd settled themselves into the borrowed aircar, Amanda gave her husband the coordinates for Steve Grayson's home where the rest of her family would be gathering throughout the evening. Just as Sarek was about to start the engine, she raised a hand.

"A moment, Sarek."

He sat back, regarding her patiently, if a little warily. She swiveled her seat so she could face all three, and looked at each a moment before beginning.

"Before we go, I want to tell you all something. Each of you expressed yourselves about your lack of interest in accompanying me on this visit, and I know your reluctance. Over the years, my family has made it clear that they will not come to Vulcan again. I can also understand their reasoning. They are earthbound and they were never entirely comfortable with my marriage. But -- I want to see them. It's been years, and I miss them. I may not get another chance. Besides, even if they've been uneasy with their Vulcan relatives, I'm very proud of you. I love you and the baser female side of my nature wants to flaunt my three intelligent, elegant, beautiful and loving men before them."

Two faces looked distinctly pained. Sahaj puffed with pride until a killing look from Spock deflated him.

She continued. "Now, I know the very idea makes you nearly ill, but this is my home planet and these are my relatives. Just as I have always conducted myself on Vulcan in a manner which would honor Tradition and each of you, I expect you to conduct yourselves at your Vulcan best -- for my sake." She looked from one sober face to the next. "I know I can count on you."

Six hours later, the roomy aircar borrowed from the McCoy's settled back to a halt at Laurel Hollow. Amanda turned to look at her three Vulcans. There was total incredulity and just the barest trace of laughter in her wide eyes. Carefully, she schooled her voice. All the way back to Laurel Hollow, she'd contemplated the evening passed in the company of her human relatives and thought carefully and soberly of what she would say. She would not allow herself to lose her composure in front of these three.

She looked from one to the other, and in a voice heavy with meaning, she said, "When I told you I wanted you

to do me proud, to represent me in a fashion that would honor all Vulcan and my choice in living there -- I expected you to comply. You did. What I did not expect," she paused to emphasize each word, "was the coded behavior and stilted formality of the ancient Samurai!"

The three faces turned toward her wore identical looks of angelic innocence. Silence fell in the aircar until Amanda sighed and murmured, "Just you wait. I'll get you for this."

She rose regally and left the car, marching up the porch steps and across the veranda with queenly dignity. A moment later, the front door gave a ladylike slam behind her.

Said Spock to Sarek: "Father, when did Mother take on this alarming tendency toward tyranny and vindictiveness?"

His eyes fixed straight ahead, Sarek replied: "She has always been that way."

"Indeed? Why did you marry her?"

"At the time..." Sarek began and faltered to a pregnant silence. Sahaj broke in.

"Yeah, well, let me tell you about how vindictive and what a tyrant she is. I could tell you a few things!"

From the front seat came the admonition, "That will be quite enough, child. Let us retire for the evening. If today's events are any indication of tomorrow's gathering of the Grayson Clan, I would recommend that you both spend a suitable time in meditation."

"An excellent idea, Father."

They exited the aircar. Neither of the adult Vulcans heard a young voice mutter despairingly. "Maybe we'll be lucky and monsoon season will set in."

CHAPTER 9: STAR WARS

Sahaj did not get his wish; the day of the barbecue dawned clear and balmy. From breakfast on, preparations were underway for the event, and, as last man on the totem pole, Sahaj found himself running errands for everyone. His mood, not good to begin with, deteriorated progressively.

Jackie Lee's disposition was no better. As morning turned into afternoon and the time for the guests' arrival drew near, her temper shortened. She finally took a broom and drove everyone out of her kitchen, declaring that she could get things done quicker herself. Sahaj was relieved to escape her barbed tongue.

The reverend had insisted on an old-fashioned barbecue, so a large hole had been dug in the green field adjoining the house. Well, Sahaj amended, not dug, exactly. He and Leonard McCoy had started to dig a hole, but Spock had come out to watch. They had been observed for a few moments as they'd sweated over the physical labor before Spock went back to the house. He'd returned within minutes with a phaser. Handy little gadgets, those phasers.

Leonard McCoy had declared himself Chef-of-the-Day, and politely refused Sahaj's offer of help, so the boy wandered around, finally settling near his grandparents. Amanda was sitting under a shady tree; Sarek was sitting next to her, but in the sun where it was warmer. It seemed odd to Sahaj that Sarek had chosen to sit on the grass...until he reasoned that no speck of dirt would dare cling to any article of clothing worn by Sarek of Vulcan.

"They are late," his grandfather was saying as Sahaj sat down cross-legged in the sun.

"It's only human," Amanda told him with an innocent smile, drawing an exasperated look.

"I fail to understand --"

Whatever it was that Sarek did not comprehend was drowned out by the blaring of three aircar horns as Amanda's family arrived in toto. The cars were parked in the front yard and their occupants spilled out amid much laughter and hugs. All the McCoy's came to meet them and introductions were quickly made.

Sahaj had a little trouble sorting out names and faces so he hung back on the path to the field to get them straight in his mind.

His Great Aunt Andrea was the one with the waist-long silver hair; a slightly taller and heavier version of his grandmother. She'd brought her husband, Mike, who reminded Sahaj of a fat sehlat. She'd also brought her two grandsons, Mark and Joe, identical fifteen year old twins. Sahaj liked them. They'd proved to be the only interesting diversion at last night's gathering.

Sahaj suffered the hug Andrea bestowed upon him as she and her family passed him on the path, then prepared himself for battle. Amanda's brother Ben was escorting his wife Melanie up the path. Ben was bad enough, but that Melanie! She claimed to be a native Georgian, but Sahaj wasn't sure that was true. In fact Sahaj wasn't even sure that Melanie was her real name. He wouldn't put it past her to have taken it from her favorite novel, *Gone With the Wind*.

"You! Boy! Fetch that refrigeration unit from my car!"

The bark belonged to Ben, but Sahaj wasn't sure that the order had been aimed at him. He looked over his shoulder to see if anyone else was standing nearby, wondering if anyone had ever told Ben Grayson that the Old South had fallen long ago. The only other person nearby was Spock, and Sahaj was sure Ben hadn't meant him. As he turned back, Sahaj caught the warning look in his father's eyes and sighed heavily. Maybe it was that dumb book. A marriage based

on *Gone With the Wind*? Maybe if Sahaj seated them on a high piece of ground they'd blow away.

"Well, boy?! I'm waitin'!"

Sahaj subsided with a respectful, "Yessir," adding under his breath, "boss".

He passed an assortment of Graysons of all ages on his way to Ben's car, from tiny Betsy, aged three, to Heddy and Bill, newlyweds, with eyes only for each other, but the Grayson he liked best was supervising the unloading of the cars.

Steve Grayson wasn't much older than Sahaj's own father, but his blond hair had grayed prematurely to a thick silver cap. His suntanned face was ruggedly handsome and he flashed his great-nephew a grin when he noticed the boy's approach.

"Hiya, Haj. Grab some of this stuff, will you?"

"Ben said I had to get the refrigeration unit," Sahaj lamented. Steve's expressive face sobered, forehead creasing with a frown as he considered the death knell Sahaj had just sounded. Lips twitching with his effort not to smile, Steve said,

"I brought some sports equipment with me. Suppose you get it out of the trunk and I'll handle Ben and his refrigeration unit?"

Sahaj brightened. He reached into the cargo deck and pulled out a heavy canvas bag crammed with what he was sure would prove...fascinating...stuff. He pulled the bag's strap over one shoulder and shifted the bulky weight.

Steve lifted the refrigeration unit into his arms and kicked the cargo door of Ben's car closed with little regard to the glossy red-orange shine his foot had just marred. Together they started up the path.

Sahaj had forgotten all about Jackie Lee in the pleasant excitement of seeing Steve again, when she leaned out the kitchen door to bellow, "You! Boy! Come here!"

Sahaj groaned. Too bad Ben Grayson was already married. He and Jackie Lee would have made a perfect pair. He met Steve's blue eyes pleadingly.

"Ah mean you, you little..." she shouted, spearing Sahaj with a look and a pointed finger. She crooked a red-tipped claw at him.

"Better go," Steve advised. "Give me that bag. I can manage both." Sahaj helped transfer the strap from his shoulder to Steve's; then, dragging his feet, he went to the back door.

"What is it?" he asked with a sigh.

"Ah need help," Jackie Lee announced.

You sure do, Sahaj thought, but wisely kept the opinion to himself as he followed her into the back pantry.

"Here," she said, handing him thermal oven gloves. "You'll need these to carry this."

He donned the mitts, curious despite himself. She turned and gave over a white covered dish with the care of one imparting an heirloom.

"You be careful with this. Take it out and put it on the table. Ah'll be out to serve it in a minute."

"But," Sahaj protested as he took the dish from her, "I was going to --"

"Well, Ah don't care! Whatever you were going to do can wait. Ah went to a lot of trouble to prepare this and you and your father and grandfather are going to eat it -- or Ah'm going to know the reason why!"

Sahaj gave her and the covered dish a dubious look. "What is it?" he asked.

"Wpubahj," she announced. "They told me that it's a Vulcan delicacy."

Stunned, all Sahaj could say was, "The 'W' and the 'J' are silent."

"Who cares? Take it outside and don't spill it!"

"Yes, ma'am."

Sahaj walked very carefully to the laden food table and set the dish gingerly at one end. The bilious, shimmering substance on the plate looked amazingly incongruous amongst the salads, corn-on-the-cob, fried chicken and grits that awaited consumption. Leonard McCoy, who was inspecting the setting, pointed at the newly-placed dish.

"More food? I thought we had plenty here already."

"Your sister said she made it special, for Grandfather and Father and me," said Sahaj.

"Jackie Lee?!" McCoy looked startled. "Oh-oh."

"What's wrong, Uncle Len?"

"I don't know...yet," the doctor murmured. He called to his sister who had just left the house. "Are you serious about this?"

"About what?"

"This...this...'special dish' you made," said McCoy. "You know you can't cook worth a damn."

She bristled. "We'll see about that, Leonard McCoy!" She turned to Sahaj. "Ah'll serve the portions. You take them to Sarek and Spock."

"Yes, ma'am."

McCoy had lifted the lid of the dish and was looking at the contents incredulously. "What the hell is this stuff?"

"Wpubahj," announced Jackie Lee, armed with Sahaj's prohibition about the "w" and the "j". She gave the boy a none too gentle shove. "Go on. Take them to your father and grandfather and here's some for you."

Sahaj balanced the three plates and forks somehow and tried very hard not to be sick. The gelatinous yellow-green accumulation that sat in the center of each plate looked nothing like his grandmother's dish. And, he suspected, it didn't taste anything like it, either.

Sarek and Spock were standing, deep in conversation. The senior Vulcans turned at Sahaj's approach.

"Here. She says we gotta eat this...stuff."

Two sets of eyebrows elevated. "Indeed." Spock helped Sahaj sort out plates and forks.

The three looked at each other, forks poised.

"What is it?" asked Sarek.

"Rather, what is it supposed to be?" asked Spock, poking suspiciously at the steaming mass. A rancid odor arose from the plate.

"She says it's Wpubahj," Sahaj informed them both.

Spock glanced disbelievingly at Sarek. His father practically shrugged in return.

"Do we have to eat it?" Sahaj pleaded.

Sarek considered, then took the initiative. "I believe that we are obligated to do so, child."

"Tuc-ret!" the boy grumbled.

"Sahaj, I have had many disagreeable duties to endure as an ambassador. However, diplomacy often requires be-numbed tastebuds and a cast iron stomach. We are guests here. We will do our duty."

"Yes, Grandfather," said the youngster, downcast.

Spock looked pained and potentially rebellious, but his father's raised eyebrow forced him to contain his inclination and obey.

Three forks dug into the concoction. Three forks were raised, reluctantly. Three dollops were ingested, chewed... and chewed...and chewed...and...swallowed.

"Blech!" spat Sahaj when he could finally speak again. He clutched at his throat dramatically.

"Indeed!" gasped Spock, hoping he could hold back the urge to retch violently.

Sarek said nothing. He had paled visibly.

"All of it, Grandfather?" Sahaj begged for release.

The two adults exchanged dismayed glances. Presently, Sarek got out, "I believe we have fulfilled our diplomatic obligation by tasting...this.... Sahaj you may remove this...substance...to a suitable location." He handed his plate to the relieved boy.

"A suitably distant location," Spock added, surrendering his own plate quickly.

Sahaj grabbed all three plates and made for the trash disposal basket near the table.

He was in the process of dumping the evidence when disaster struck in the form of one enraged southern belle.

"What do you think you're doing with that Wpubahj, you little monster!!"

Sahaj froze, horrified.

Just as her clawed hand descended to his shoulder rescue arrived in the form of his Uncle Len.

"Jackie, you leave that kid alone! What the hell's biting you this time, anyway?"

"This little creep has been the bane of my existence since I first laid eyes on him -- poking into things he shouldn't, destroying my peace of mind! Now, he's trying to sabotage my culinary abilities!"

"Well, since your culinary abilities are non-existent to begin with, I don't see where that's much of a crime."

"Why...you --!"

"Never mind that. What's the trouble here, anyway?" McCoy directed his question to Sahaj.

"It's this...stuff...she gave us, Uncle Len."

"Yeah...the watchamacallit," said McCoy. "What about it?"

Sahaj gulped. "It's...it's...inedible."

"Inedible?!" Jackie Lee cried. "You little --"

McCoy pulled the boy out of her reach. "Never mind that, dear sister. Why persecute Sahaj for telling the truth? Where'd you ever get that stuff to begin with?"

Jackie Lee drew herself up. "It's freeze-dried Wpubahj, from the Bloomingdale's Gourmet Shop in New York. It was imported all the way from Vulcan and Ah made it especially for them -- the ingrates!"

"That explains it," said McCoy, taking the plates from Sahaj. "Garbage!" He dumped them unceremoniously. Jackie Lee began to screech a protest. "Shut up!" To Sahaj, McCoy said, "Forget it, kid. Go on. I think Steve Grayson is looking for you."

As the boy gratefully departed, McCoy took his sister's arm. "You -- come with me. I have a few *thousand things* I've been dying to tell you...."

He dragged Jackie Lee back toward the barbecue fire just as Sahaj spotted Steve Grayson. He was standing in the middle of the field where a diamond-shaped course had been marked. Sahaj trotted toward him.

"You were looking for me, Uncle Steve?"

"Sure was. How about getting up a game of that r...r-ra...that Venturian game you were telling me about last night?"

"R-rampa," Sahaj supplied. He panned the area; small groups were gathered under the trees, talking and laughing...except for Sarek and Spock. They were just standing there, sipping at tall glasses of water that Sahaj supposed they were using to dilute the 'Wpubahj' in their systems. He turned a regretful face to his great uncle. "It's kinda rough. I don't think we'd better."

"I see." Steve hesitated, considering. "How about softball instead?"

"I don't think I should --"

"My boy, you have to! Softball is a tradition at any barbecue. Ask your grandmother. She pitched for our team right from the time she was seven years old, up to the time your grandfather came and stole her away. I'll never forgive him for that, either... 'cause we never won another game after she left. Go on and ask her if it's all right."

Sahaj let himself be persuaded. To his astonishment, not only did his grandmother readily give permission for him to play, she decided she was going to play, too! And worse yet, she and Steve declared themselves captains of opposing teams. They immediately began counting heads to see if they'd have enough for two full teams.

"Count me out! I'm cookin'," Leonard McCoy called. He was cooking all right. Enough for an army!

"We should have at least 18 people for a fair game..." Steve told his sister, "...and we'll have 19 if everyone here plays."

Sarek lifted his head slowly, panning to his very young brother-in-law with the outlandish ideas. "I regret that I must decline your offer. I have no knowledge of the activity."

"Oh, come on, Sarek, don't be such a spoilsport." Amanda met her husband's startled look levelly, her eyes dancing with mischief. Her revenge would be oh, so sweet!

Sarek, ever the diplomat, said, "Observing should prove educational." Once Amanda got going there was no stopping her. To confirm his thought she went inside and changed into a one-piece jumpsuit, and when she returned her hair was unbound. She gathered the long waves at the nape of her neck and fastened the cascade of silver and strawberry-blond tresses into a long tail. Sarek sighed at the breach of Vulcan etiquette.

The reverend hauled himself to his feet, handing young Betsy back to her mother. "Ah'm gonna play," he announced. He caught his son's look of protest out of the corner of his eye and pointed his cane at the 'chef'. "And don't you be givin' me any of your lip, sonny. Laurel Hollow has never hosted a bar-b-que that I didn't play ball at! I ain't dead yet, you know!"

"Keep this up and you might well be," Leonard growled, throwing up his hands in defeat. The reverend turned back to the team captains. "All right, Steve Grayson. Let's get a move on. Choose sides."

Steve put both hands on Sahaj's shoulders. "What position do you want to play?"

"Catcher," he answered readily.

"All right. The equipment is in the bag." Steve looked up, meeting his sister's eyes, inviting her to choose a team member.

She scanned the assembled group, but she'd picked her victim minutes ago. "Spock," she said firmly.

Her son stopped speaking in the middle of a word. He turned his head to look at her, communicating with that glance that when Sarek had refused it had been for them both. The expression on her face changed minutely in answer, daring him to defy her, saying more with a single look than was said at a truce negotiation among six warring worlds.

Spock looked to his father for assistance, but the position of a graying eyebrow told him he was on his own. Spock sighed deeply and went over to join his 'captain'. The beaming smile he was awarded almost mollified him for the pending damage to his dignity. Sahaj was nearby with the twins, Mark and Joe, spilling the contents of the equipment bag onto the lush grass. He handed the bases to Mark and began to pick out the catcher's gear.

"I'm pleased that you're going to play, Father." Sahaj, busy at his task, didn't see the hard look he was given. "Do you require instruction?"

"Do you?" Spock countered. Sahaj paused in his hunt, realizing that he'd trapped himself into an admission he had no desire to give. "No, Father...uh...Jason taught me how to play."

A nearby commotion interrupted them.

"Jackie Lee, you come up here, girl!" the reverend roared. "Amanda wants you on our team, Lord knows why! Maybe she doesn't know that you can't catch."

"It's too hot to play ball," Jackie complained, languishing under the shade of a huge oak tree.

"Jackie!!"

"All right, all right. Ah'm coming, Daddy. Lord knows, you'll need someone out there to catch you when you fall. Imagine a man your age playing softball. Why the very idea appalls me --!"

"Hush up that mouth!"

"We're just about ready," Steve said, looking squarely at Sarek who had remained where he was, well out of the way of the mass insanity. He had three-year-old Betsy for company, and he was finding her babble far more intelligent than anything any of the others were saying. "We need an umpire." Sarek shook his head, refusing the dubious honor.

"We want five outs," Amanda informed her brother. "That's because you've got all the young blood on your team. And we don't need an umpire. This is a friendly game. The catcher can make the calls -- play both positions."

The last order of business, that of choosing home team, was quickly settled. Steve's team positioned themselves in the field, while Amanda decided on her batting lineup. Steve, pitching for his team, threw the ball to Sahaj.

"Batter," Sahaj called when the 'umpire' had decided that the warm-up had gone on long enough.

Curly-haired Joe stepped up to the base. Both he and his twin were left-handed batters, so Sahaj, as catcher, motioned the right fielders to adjust themselves accordingly.

Joe tied into the first pitch for an easy double.

The second batter, eight-year-old Tracy, struck out, turned around and swatted Sahaj on the shoulder, before running tearfully back to her teammates.

The third batter tipped a foul in back of home plate. Sahaj caught it in mid-air. "You're out!" he called, pleased that it was Ben huffing his way back to the bench. Sahaj watched the next batter come to the base warily. His grandmother had chosen her 'cleanup man' well: Spock.

"We ought to take back those extra outs," Sahaj called to Steve.

"We can't do that. It wouldn't be fair."

"This isn't going to be fair, either," Sahaj grumbled.

"No personal comments from the official, if you please," Amanda said from the sidelines, her face demure and her blue eyes lit with laughter. Sahaj gave her an exasperated look and jerked on the protective headgear.

"Play ball!" he ordered.

Steve arched the ball ten feet into the air. It sailed toward the base, breaking over the inside corner and dropping into Sahaj's gloved hand.

"Strike one," the umpire announced and catcher returned the ball to the pitcher.

"No batter," Sahaj called, encouraging Steve to repeat the perfect pitch. "He can't hit!" Spock slowly turned his eyes on his son, looking as though he were half tempted to prove Sahaj wrong by an application of the bat to the appropriate portion of the child's anatomy. "It's perfectly legal, Father," Sahaj said rapidly, inching back. "It's supposed to throw off the batter's concentration."

"Indeed, child," Spock told him dryly. "Have you forgotten with whom you are dealing?"

"Well," Sahaj said, thoughtfully drawing out the word, "random factors may unite to form most interesting results."

Spock assumed the proper batter's stance, hands gripping the bat firmly, feet spread apart. Just as the ball was pitched, he heard from behind him:

"Whooooosssshhhhh!"

Spock checked his swing.

"Strike two!"

Applause from the outfield...shouted encouragement from the bench. Spock gave his son a look that promised trouble.

"This is it, Uncle Steve!" yelled Sahaj, ignoring the warning. "You've got him now!"

The bat connected squarely on the third pitch. Obviously Spock had carefully gauged his strength to Earth's lighter gravity. Even so, the ball flew high over the second baseman's head.

Spock trotted easily around first and continued toward second. Sahaj pulled off his face mask and stood before the base, hoping that the outfielder could get the ball back to him before Spock scored.

But Spock was halfway to third base when the outfielder caught up with the ball. Logically, he should content himself with attaining the base. He approached his destination cautiously suddenly aware of his mother's presence behind the baseline. He slowed.

"Don't stop! Go...go!" She pointed with her whole arm toward home plate.

"Mother --"

"Don't argue, Spock!"

Both eyebrows winged upward and Spock obeyed.

Sahaj was frantically waving for the ball. "Hurry up! Hurry up!"

Spock thought this advice, although not meant for him, was sound. The ball was in the infield and sailing for the catcher. Only a few more steps and --

"Slide!" came his mother's command. "Slide!"

"I've got it! I've got it!" Sahaj hollered, poised for the catch. "I knew we'd get him out! I knew it!"

Indeed, Spock thought dryly. Service-trained muscles obeyed the half thought. In one, graceful motion his legs shot out and he leaned back into the controlled fall necessary to the maneuver. A cloud of red dust was displaced as the law of inertia was proven once more.

Both Spock and the ball arrived at home plate within milliseconds of each other. Sahaj touched Spock's leg with the ball.

Sahaj announced over the cheers of both teams, each of which thought the play had been in its favor, "You're out!"

Spock looked up at his son. "You are in error, Sahaj. I was precisely one tenth of a second in advance of the tag."

"No, Father. I tagged you two tenths of a second before you touched base."

Spock rose to tower imposingly over the boy. His eyes were fastened to Sahaj's face. "Are you questioning the accuracy of my time sense?" Sahaj was unimpressed.

"Look. I'm the umpire and I said you were out! Now, are you going to go peaceably, or am I going to have to throw you out of the game?"

Amanda turned her head, her hand shielding her face and her laughter at the identical scowls worn by her son and grandson. No one else dared react.

"Child, perhaps a review of the regulations would --"

"I know the regulations! You were out! Where'd you learn to play softball, anyway?"

"Child --"

"Spock."

All heads turned to the sidelines from which the quiet command for silence had issued. Sarek continued, undisturbed by the stares.

"You were 'out' by three-tenths of a second."

Amanda made a bee-line for the lemonade pitcher, her shoulders shaking with laughter. Spock, however, was not amused.

"Father, I thought that the purpose of your observing this sport was to learn."

"The elements of this activity become evident after only a few moment's observation," Sarek told his son. "You ...were out."

Sahaj flashed Sarek a look of gratitude for the support, then lifted smug eyes to his father. Sahaj pointed to the bench.

"We will discuss this later, child," Spock told Sahaj in an undertone. The half-smile on the boy's face vanished.

"You may continue," Sarek announced, assuming the role of umpire after all. Betsy settled herself in his lap and nestled contentedly against his chest. Sahaj gaped. He shook his head sharply as if to clear it. He had the sensation that the world was tipping over. It straightened slightly when Sarek added: "And Sahaj, in the future, do not address your father in that tone of voice."

"Yes, sir."

Spock walked off the field, brushing the soil from his clothes. He spared an accusing glare at his mother and seated himself on the grass not far from Sarek.

The red soil of the Forge, or the red clay of Georgia -- Sarek broke off his thought as the reverend limped up for his turn, ignoring Sahaj's offer of a bat, preferring to use his cane instead. The ball came in slowly, arched perfectly over the center of the plate. Alan swung...and connected. The ball sailed back to the pitcher, who fumbled it -- purposely, Sahaj guessed -- so the reverend could make it to first base. Sahaj looked at his grandfather to see if Sarek was going to object to the non-regulation bat, but found Sarek studying the bright blue of the cloudless sky.

Alan McCoy stepped off first base, calling for Mark to run for him. Sarek, still studying the blue space, announced: "The player at first is out."

"What??!!" the reverend bellowed.

"Unless I am mistaken, in this game, the player must remain in contact with the base until the courtesy runner arrives. You..." Sarek brought his line of sight down to include the furious Alan McCoy, "...are out."

"Why you --!"

Sarek pointed to the bench. "Sit."

"Damned vegetable eater," Alan accused, stomping to his teammates in a fit of temper. Jackie Lee held out her hand to assist him, but he slapped it away and sat next to her, his arms folded across his thin chest, staring into the distance.

Amanda chose a bat and stepped up to the plate. "One word from you, young man, and there is going to be trouble," she warned her grandson.

Sahaj looked startled by the unexpected attack, but decided to heed the warning. In his grandmother's present state of insanity there was no telling what she was likely to do.

The pitch came in. Amanda swung.

"Strike one," came the calm call from the sidelines. Amanda shot her husband a look that promised vengeance, squared her shoulders and took a practice swing with the bat. She set her feet firmly. The second ball was pitched.

"Strike two."

Sahaj winced. He'd seen that expression on Amanda's face before and it always heralded a catastrophe. If she struck out....

The third pitch was a batter's dream. Amanda tossed the bat down and ran for first base.

"Safe," the umpire announced. The reverend jumped up, apoplectic.

"She's out! SHE NEVER HIT THE BALL!!" He stormed over to Sarek, who rose, setting Betsy on her feet. All eyes were on them and no one saw Sahaj stick the ball behind his chest protector.

"Reverend McCoy, I assure you, the batter is safe at first."

"You're cockeyed! Talk about playing favorites! You --"

"Easy, Dad," Leonard McCoy counselled, leaving the cookfire. "Don't get excited. It isn't good for you."

"Shut up!" Alan bellowed. The rest of the players crowded around them and a number of separate arguments broke out amongst them.

Sahaj, waiting at the safety of home plate, glanced at his grandmother. Amanda was waiting at first, studying her nails, looking for all the world as though nothing extraordinary were occurring, even when the reverend's voice broke above the din.

"Sarek, you old goat! She never hit the ball! You're blind!"

"Sir, my eyesight is quite unimpaired. In addition, Vulcan eyesight is 27% more accurate than human eyesight."

"And," Spock added, coming to stand at his father's side, "Vulcan hearing is more astute than human hearing."

"You tryin' to tell me that you heard her hit the ball, son?"

"Sir, with all due respect, I feel compelled to point out that we are not related, and to answer your question, yes I did, in fact, hear the impact of the bat against the ball."

Sahaj's lower jaw dropped. Casually, he glanced into the pocket formed by the bulky chest protector. Uh-huh. The ball was still there. He wasn't crazy...it was everyone else! He sighed resignedly. Best to leave adult matters to adults.

The reverend glared from Spock to Sarek, reading nothing in the two impassive faces, then whirled suddenly and stomped to home plate. "The catcher ought to know if the ball was hit or not. Well, son?"

Sahaj, still crouched in the catcher's position, was so startled by the unexpected assault that he fell backward into a neat sit. He opened his mouth to answer...but couldn't think of anything to say. This entire situation was absurd. To complicate matters, both Spock and Sarek walked over to join the reverend. All three stared down at the speechless boy and everyone else crowded in.

"Well...I..." Sahaj cleared his throat, looking around: surrounded. No escape. No matter what he'd say he'd be wrong.

"You were witness to the situation, were you not?" Spock asked him, voice and expression carefully neutral.

"Well...I..." Sahaj gulped, adding, "...sort of," in a weak voice.

"Illogical," Sarek announced. "Either you were witness or you were not. Which is it, child?"

Sahaj cocked his head to one side, listening for the trace of dry humor he thought he'd heard in his grandfather's voice, but perhaps he'd imagined it. And the reverend was certainly dead serious about this whole thing.

"Well, boy? 'Fess up," Alan demanded. "And tell the truth. You wouldn't want to ruin your character, would you?"

"I...well...uh..." Sahaj swallowed hard, looking at the sea of faces around him, wishing desperately for home.

"Sahaj, quit stallin' boy, afore I take my cane to you!"

"Well..." Sahaj looked at Sarek, took a deep breath and looked away. Hesitantly, he began. "...We Vulcans..." A bit of sparkle lit his eyes and he continued with more assurance. "Yes. We Vulcans have the ability to perform simple physical tasks while concentrating on other matters." Sahaj caught the half-nod of approval from Sarek and relaxed slightly. "And when the ball was pitched I was practicing certain...mental disciplines."

"Most commendable," Spock told him.

"Yeah? Well, Ah don't understand any of this gobbledegook. What 'mental disciplines'??!"

"I was concentrating on the silent recitation of an ancient piece of literature."

"Which one?!" the reverend said through gritted teeth, tried to the end of his patience.

"The Twenty-third Psalm?" Sahaj tried. He hoped Sarek would forgive him. The reverend threw up his hands in disgust and glared.

"Vulcan concentration, huh?" He lifted an accusing stare to Spock. "And Vulcan hearing, right?" His eyes snapped toward Sarek. "And Vulcan eyesight...!" He turned his entire body toward first base where Amanda still waited, apparently oblivious to the commotion. "How do you put up with them?!"

She finally looked up, fluttering her eyelashes coyly, and sighing as though she bore the yoke of a thousand worlds on her shoulders. "I try," she said with another long sigh. "Lord knows, I try."

Three pairs of incredulous Vulcan eyebrows snapped up simultaneously. Three pairs of Vulcan eyes riveted on her. Three Vulcans wore identical looks of pained disbelief. That was it, Sahaj decided. When he got his family home he was taking them all to the healer, and then he was going to go up to his room, sit down on his bed, and have a nice, long cry! They were all mad!

"All right! Food's ready! Come and get it!" Leonard McCoy called, glad of the excuse to break off the fracas. Still glowering, Reverend McCoy led the way off the battlefield.

Spock put his arm around Sahaj's shoulders and gave him a quick, hopefully unobserved, hug. "An admirable attempt at diplomacy, my son." Long, slim fingers slipped behind the chest protector and removed the softball. It was casually tossed into the sports bag as they passed, lest the reverend see it and start anew.

CHAPTER 10: JUST YOU WAIT, 'ENRY 'IGGINS!

The end of the Starfleet officers' leave coincided with the departure time of the guests from Vulcan. Amanda had decided that they'd all leave together in the aircar they had rented, overruling Spock's protest that the compact model would not comfortably seat four adults and one half-grown child. It would have been undignified to belabor the point in front of the McCoy's, so Spock had accepted his mother's decree and was concentrating on the physical impossibility of loading all their luggage in the incredibly small cargo area. Fortunately, the ride to the transport center would not take long. There, he and McCoy would board a Moonbase shuttle; the first step in their journey back to the Enterprise. And Spock couldn't see the familiar blue-gray walls of his starship too soon.

While Spock counted bags, calculated surface area and constructed a logical order for the placement of the baggage, their hosts, his mother and his son stood on the wide veranda, talking. Sarek was nowhere to be seen.

After a few minutes, Doctor McCoy appropriated his sister's arm and guided her down the steps. They walked around the side of the house, conversing in low voices. Sahaj glanced up, saw the puzzled look on his father's face and joined him near the luggage.

"Perhaps if you arranged the baggage so as --"

Spock's eyes shifted to the boy, daring him to continue. Sahaj shrugged.

"I was only trying to help."

The reverend hobbled up behind Sahaj and placed both hands on the youth's shoulders. "You listen to your daddy, boy. He knows what he's doin'."

"I always obey my father," Sahaj answered. Spock's eyes widened incredulously.

The eldest McCoy's blue-gray eyes sparkled with mischief. "You sure this is your boy, Spock?"

"Indeed. Your son conducted the genetic testing himself."

"Hrumph! If Leonard did the testing you should have had the results double-checked!"

"I did, sir."

"Well, it beats tarnation out of me how a fine man like you could have such a scamp of a son."

Spock caught the boy's eyes. "I have often wondered about that myself."

Reverend Doctor Alan McCoy extended his hand. "It's been a pleasure having you as our guest, Spock. You and your family are welcome here anytime."

The statement was sincere. Spock decided to forgo his cultural aloofness and clasped hands briefly in the ancient Earth gesture. "I am sure I speak for my father in extending you the hospitality of Valjn'd'jt."

"Yes, please do come, Alan," Amanda seconded as she joined them. She clasped both the reverend's hands in her own. "We've had a marvelous time. Thank you." She kissed his lined cheek before stepping back.

Spock, having finished his calculations, made quick work of loading the baggage and snapped the compartment closed with a measure of satisfaction.

It was time to leave. Jackie Lee and Leonard approached them, stopping about five feet away to exchange a hug. McCoy took his sister by the shoulders and held her back at arm's length, giving her a stern look. "Jackie, the next time you call me off duty for a medical emergency there'd better be one. Remember the boy who cried wolf?" He lowered his voice so they wouldn't be overheard. "If Dad really needs me, I'll be here, but until then..." He glanced at his father, and a wistful smile crossed his face. "Take care of him, Honey."

She smiled in agreement, for once thinking of someone else. Leonard was just thinking that she could be mighty pretty when she wanted to be, and then a hint of devilry sparkled into her eyes. "Don't 'honey' me, Leonard Beauregard McCoy! Why --"

"Shhh!" He silenced her with a hand over her mouth and a scandalized look at Spock. Lord knew what the Vulcan would do with such a priceless bit of ammunition.

But it wasn't the science officer who picked up on the indiscretion. It was a small, elfin child.

Sahaj met McCoy's apprehensive glance, his own brown eyes dancing with joy. "Beauregard?!" he mouthed.

"Now you see what you've done, Jackie? I'll never live it down.... Take care of yourself, m'dear."

"You take care yourself."

"With all due respect, I suggest beginning our journey. If we delay much longer, Mother, you will miss your connection."

"I'm ready...but where's Sarek?"

"He's in the house," Sahaj told her.

"Go inside and hurry him along."

"Me?!" Sahaj was appalled at the prospect.

"Yes, you."

Sahaj's shoulders heaved in a silent sigh, but he obeyed.

"I simply don't understand it. Sarek is never late for anything. I hope nothing's wrong."

Her worry was alleviated a few minutes later when Sarek strode out of the house. Sahaj followed a few steps behind, something suspiciously like a smile fighting for control of the youth's features. It lost to a too-neutral

expression. Carefully avoiding any eye contact with his grandfather, he waited by the porch stairs while Sarek bid his goodbyes. He couldn't even look at Sarek when he passed him to get into the aircar.

Spock and Doctor McCoy shared the uncomfortably small back seat.

"One would think that the designers of these cars would take into consideration the fact that we are not all dwarfs." Spock tried to find a comfortable position for his long legs, did, and then had to rearrange himself when Sahaj climbed in. There was nowhere else for the boy but his father's lap. Spock finally angled into a semi-comfortable position. "Don't move," he told his son.

"Yes, Father."

There was laughter in his son's voice. Spock gave him an odd look as Sarek activated the computer controls which lifted the car into the air.

"I fail to understand the humor in the situation, my son."

Sahaj almost laughed aloud. To control his illogical desire he looked out the window. The reverend and Jackie Lee were growing small as the car soared to its cruising height. Sahaj lifted a hand in farewell, wondering if the gesture would be seen. It was, and returned.

As the red clay and green hills of Georgia flew past, the boy wondered wistfully how long it would be before he saw them again.

CHAPTER 11: FARENHEIT 212...AND STILL BOILING

"Well," Alan McCoy said with a sigh. "That's that." Some of the light faded from his eyes.

"And it didn't happen soon enough for me," his daughter huffed, arms folded across her chest, her lips set in a straight line.

"Vulcan is Vulcan, and human is human, and the twain met head on," the old man said to himself. She glanced at him.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Come into the house, Daddy. It's starting to get damp."

"Not yet, Jackie. I think I'll sit on the porch for a while."

"Not too long," she cautioned, leaving him by the porch swing.

It took the reverend thirty painful seconds of argument with suddenly stiff joints to lower himself gingerly into the swing. He had just achieved his goal when Jackie Lee stepped from the porch into the front hall. There was a bloodcurdling scream from within the house.

With considerably greater agility, he leaped to his feet, clutching knee joints that protested such abuse, and hurried inside to see what kind of monster had grabbed his daughter by the throat. Whatever it was, it was strangling her, judging from the incoherent bumbles that were issuing from her throat.

"What the hell --??" Alan demanded as he bounded through the doorway.

And then he saw it: the single, trilling canary perched on the bannister. His eyes slowly panned upward, to the attractive twelve foot long cylinder that had once housed Jackie Lee's prized canaries. The door was open and not a single, spectacular wing could be seen. He choked back the laughter bubbling within him, watching the next act of the play as his daughter stalked the single bird remaining in the house.

"Come here, sweetheart," she crooned, holding out an extended forefinger for the canary to perch on. "Come to Mama."

The sweet trill was abruptly broken in mid-note and the bird spread its wings and circled the room once...before following his companions out the open window. Jackie Lee made a mangled attempt to catch it.

"He got you again, Honey!" the reverend chortled. Jackie stamped her foot in a black rage, folded her arms across her chest and paced the length of the hall.

"Damn that boy! Leonard better not ever bring that little monster back here because Ah'll kill him and that kid, father or no father! Oh, just wait until Ah get my hands on him! Ah'll break every bone in that skinny little green body! Ah've got half a mind to get into the aircar and follow them! Why Ah...."

Jackie ranted on. Alan was laughing so hard that his legs gave out under him and he collapsed to the bench, holding his sides to ease the stitch his guffaws had caused. Yes, the Vulcans were gone, and with them the interest and excitement of personal conflicts, but the reverend knew that Jackie Lee would provide diversion for days to come.

"I simply don't understand it," Amanda remarked to no one in particular.

"Understand what, my wife?"

"What took you so long in there? It's not like you to be late."

There was a choked sound from the back seat, but by the time Spock turned a frown in his son's direction, Sahaj was looking saintly...so saintly that there was an impression of a halo hovering over his head. Something strange was going on.

"Had you stopped to consider," Sarek answered, carefully pacing his words for effect, "that perhaps I...felt...some regret at leaving?"

The halo vanished. Sahaj couldn't help it. Smothered laughter issued from the back of his throat, despite the hand he had clamped over his mouth. Sarek turned head and shoulders back to look at the boy. At the guileless look in his grandfather's eyes, Sahaj convulsed and turned to press his face against Spock's shoulder.

"Sahaj --" Spock warned.

"Leave the child be."

Spock's lower jaw dropped. That was Sarek speaking??!! He looked down at his son, back to his father, and over to McCoy. The doctor looked puzzled. Spock answered the unspoken question with a look that said that he, too, hadn't the faintest idea of what was going on.

"No, really, Sarek," Amanda persisted. "Why were you late?"

Sahaj turned his head, peeing out at his grandfather just in time to receive the conspiratorial glance Sarek bestowed in his direction.

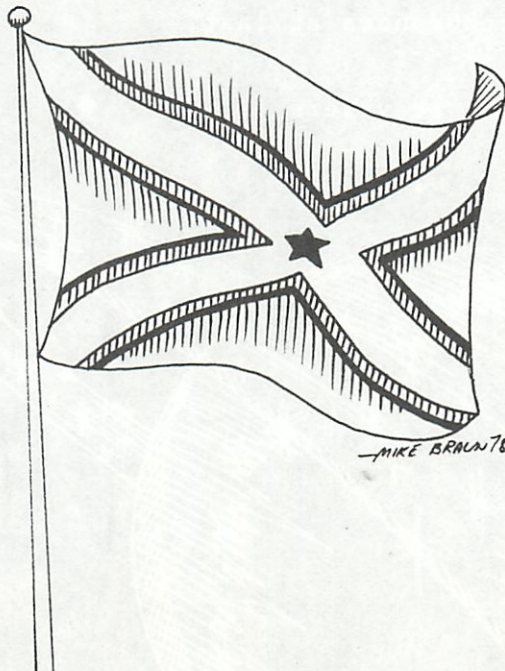
The patriarch turned his attention back to his piloting, shifting in the seat, straightening. Finally, he answered Amanda's question.

"We Vulcans," he began, apparently for McCoy's benefit, "believe in duty and obligation. Before leaving Laurel Hollow, I had a final duty to perform."

"What duty?" asked Amanda incredulously.

The answer came from the back seat. A childish tenor sang softly:

We are a band of brothers,
And native to this soil,
Fighting for our liberty
With treasure, blood and toil.
And when our rights were threatened,
The cry rose near and far:
Hurrah for the bonnie blue flag
that bears the single star!



STAR-CHILD

Lucy Miner

Heavy rumbling world
Confined to circle round your ceaseless sun
Spinning, spinning endlessly,
Visionless within your rigid orb.

Locked within your wall-less prison
You must be content
While I am free
To move at will among the stars.

For I am a space child,
Born to wander
Homeless but at home.

Brother am I to stars,
Sister to planets,
Cousin to itinerant comets.

These I call family.
They beckon me
And I race with outstretched arms
To gather their warm familiarity around me.

This is my place -- I have chosen.

And when the hoary years
Have placed their claim
Upon this fragile flesh,
I shall continue
Free of human encumbrances at last,
Free to wander still --
A perennial child
Among these ancient travelers --
A star-child.



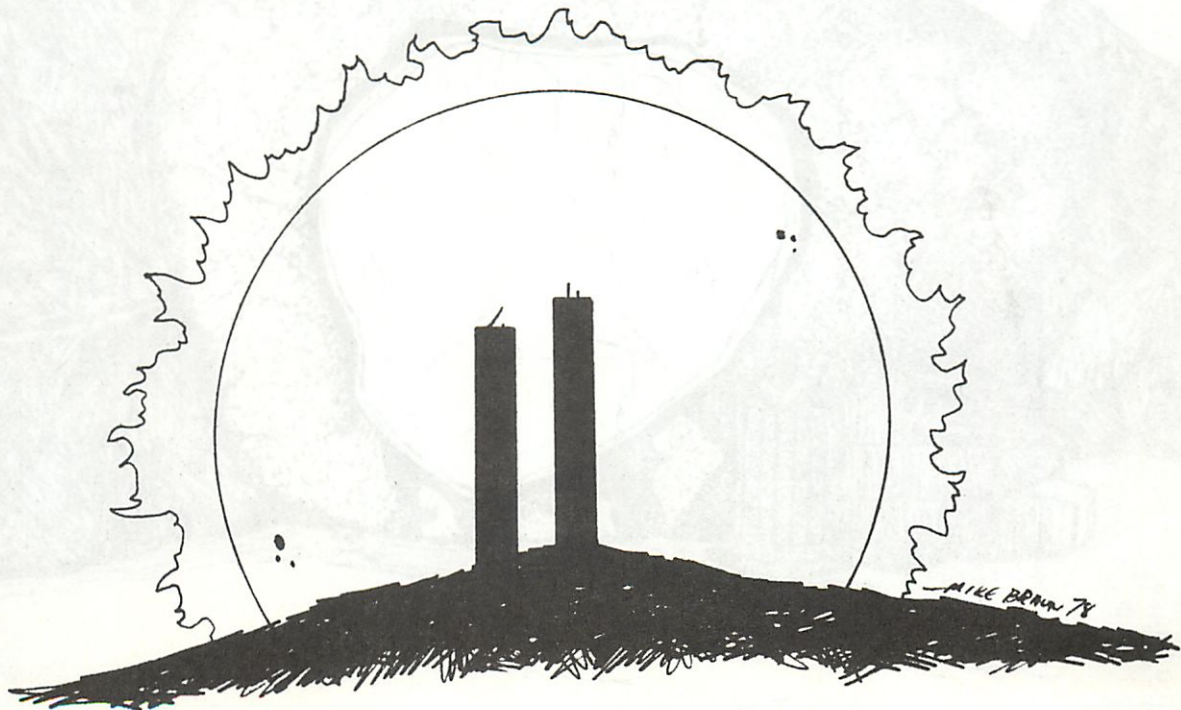
What kind of a world is it
When a man looks up,
Straining his eyes to see
The top of a 102 story building,
Or is it 110 now,
Or does it really matter?

There are no stars here.
What kind of a place is it
That has no stars?

Men need stars.
They need to be reminded
That somewhere in the vast universe
Or in their own finite world
there is at least one piece
Of infinite and undestructable beauty.

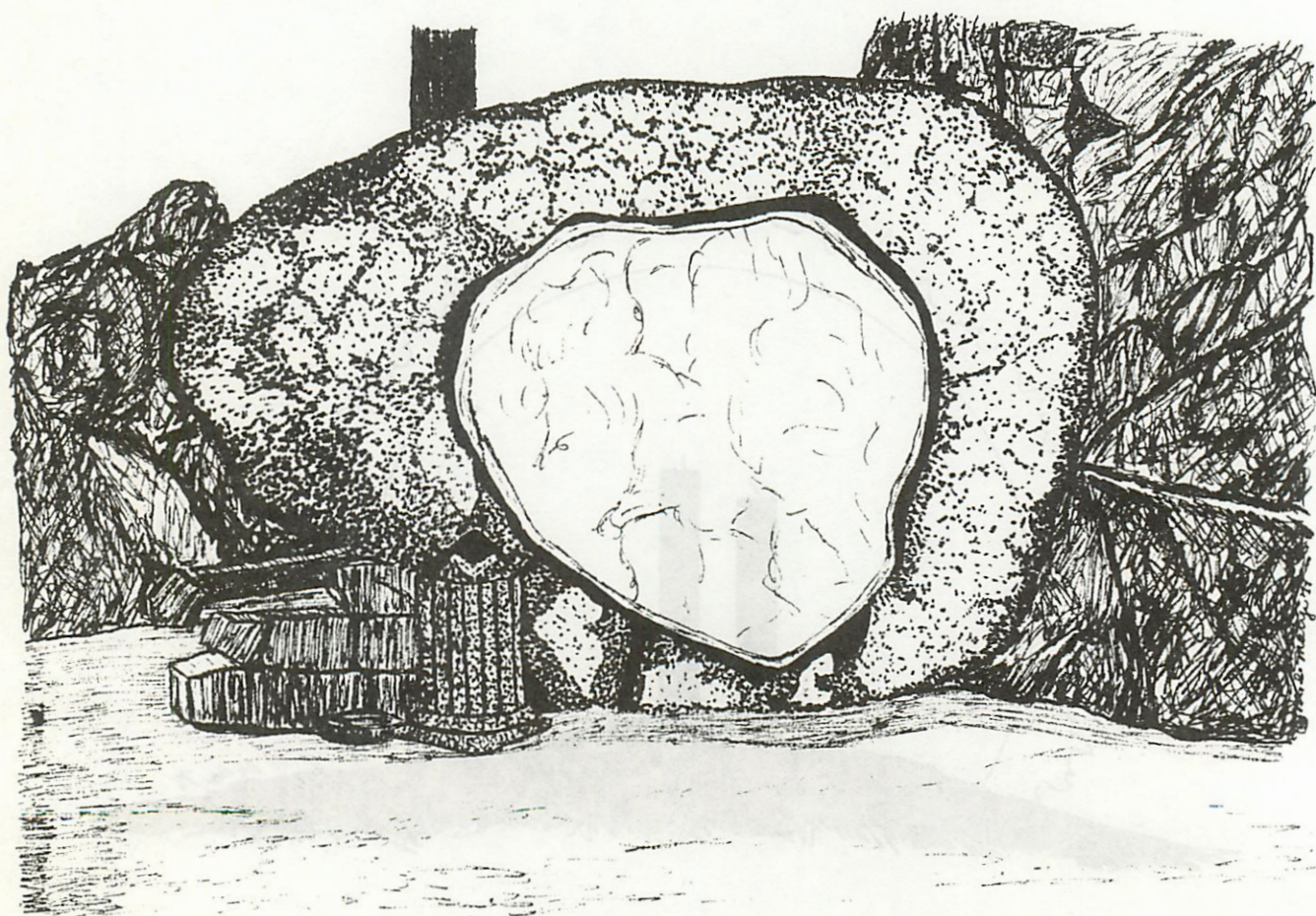
There are no stars here
And I am lost.
How can I live without stars?

Lucy Miner



guardian

Anne
Elizabeth
Zeek



I have been stationed here what, a month? A year? A century even? It doesn't matter, really. What does matter is that I have been here long enough to see the truth behind the false realities with which we live.

Time acts strangely here. It ebbs and flows past the break-water on which I stand. Its tides are beyond measure, beyond knowledge. Moment laps upon moment, century upon century, and the sands of eternity are scarcely ruffled. Out of season, out of order, the flotsam and the jetsam of all ages wash ashore to be stranded in an eternal Now.

Time is/was/will be forever, and the shards of the City standing close by are/were/will be washed in the tides of Time ever and now. Over all broods the presence of the Gate, guardian to forever, forever guarded by Time. An eon of Nows, forever fragments/eternally fused, are realized by the presence. In its mirrored and refracted moments or reality, ever future/past, ever now, are all realities.

I watch, my task to guard the Guardian. Yet who guards me? Again and again I find myself drawn to the reality pictured within the portal of the Gate. I have memorized that moment. I have viewed it time upon time, again and again, endless repetitions of a Now now etched in its eternity into my mind. I watch helplessly as you die, again and yet again, now and then. You die because I -- just once -- was not at your side.

I wept, when first you died. I wept again on seeing your death relived in the Gate. But after a thousand deaths I began to see that it does not matter. I have come to accept this endless repetition of your death, at least for now.

For I understand Time's logic. You will die, again and again, and I will live your death with you. This is my punishment for having failed you. But the time will come -- has been? -- when my punishment will be met and I will be free -- free to dare Time's tides, to plumb its depths. I will enter the Gate, will return to that moment, and I will save you. My life will be whole again.

Those I leave behind? It does not matter. There are untold yesterdays, untold tomorrows. Let each choose his own.

I guard the Guardian. Who guards me?

“the ONE named Kirk”

Steady, hazel eyes
 seem dark;
until they light with laughter,
 shine with pity,
 warm to love.

Flowing-current voice
 seems stern;
until it breaks in sorrow,
 grins pure mischief,
 pleads vast hopes.

Mobile features
 seem a proud mask
until they brighten to rage,
 furrow with worry,
 burn with pride.

Star-bright blazing
 life
 burns clear within
 this man:

Illuminating,
 reaching out,
 discovering,
 the depths of a galaxy,
the reaches of a soul.

Finding
 truth,
 diversity,
 and joy.

Ronni Sacksteder



Firebearer